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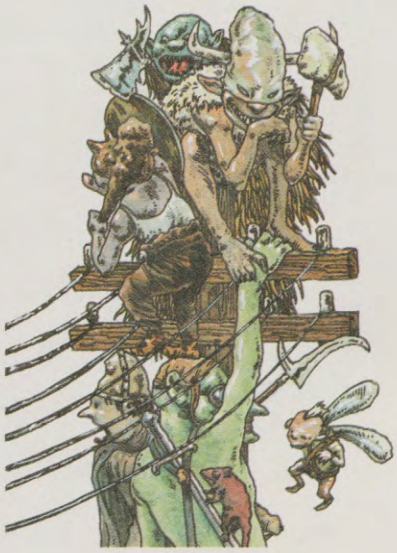
You can play with a cast of thousands over the Internet. Let us tell you what you need to get on line, and what games you should be playing out there.

Fire on the line feature on page 30



We were at GenCon, and we're going to tell you all about it, and the games you'll be playing next year.

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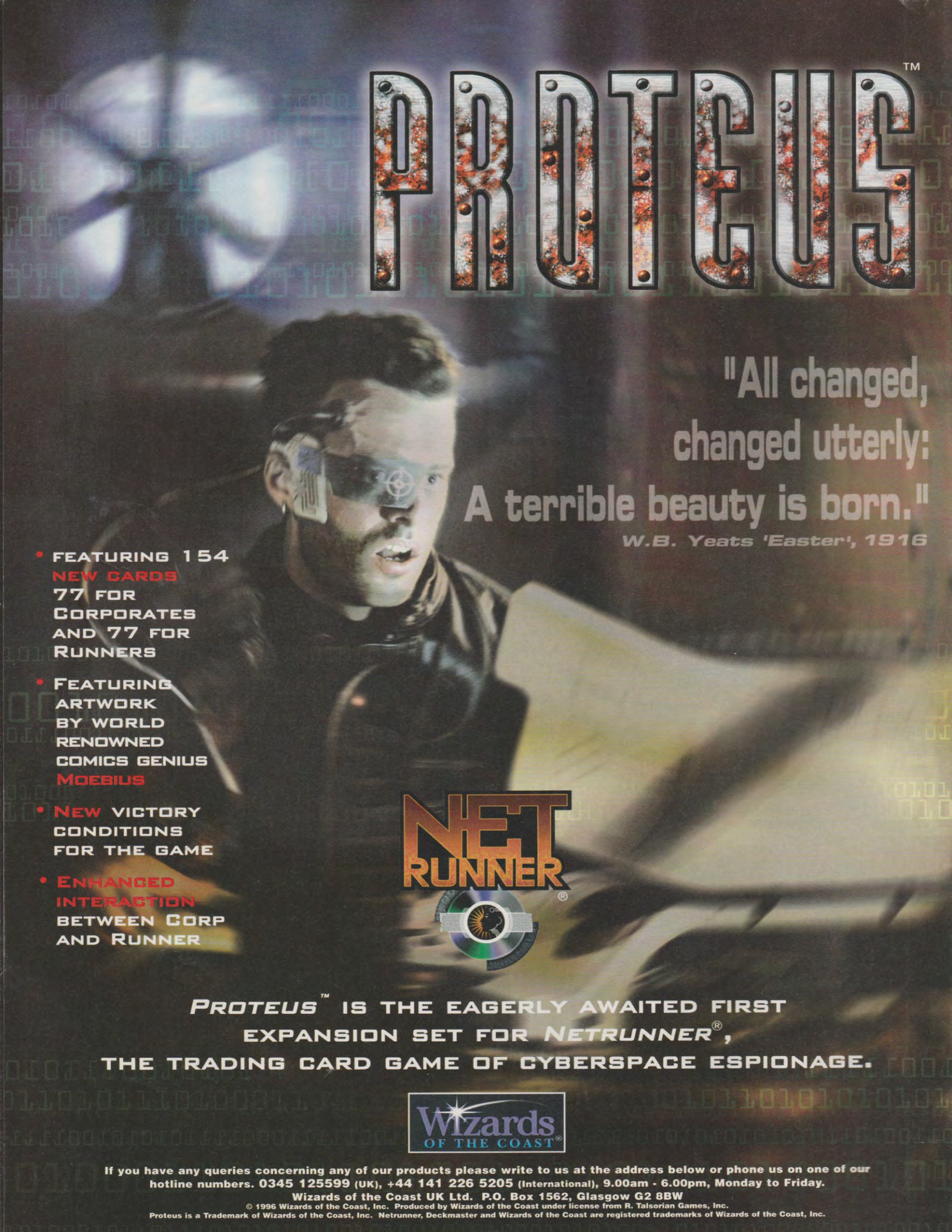
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UP FRONT

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This issue would have been impossible without...
ceiling fans
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **the damned heat**

I'm always on the lookout for your comments about **arcane**. If you want to drop me a line, write to the Editor at the **arcane** address on the left, or e-mail: pettengale@futurenet.co.uk

Does anyone remember *Dragon Warriors*? Yes, that was the entire roleplaying game system published by Corgie in paperback book format. If so, or even if you don't, take a look at our retrospective review of this classic system on page 21.

Time was a visionary, there's no doubt about that. When William Gibson got the whole 'cyberpunk' thing going back in the mid-eighties, he couldn't have had any idea just how soon it would be before the world was getting 'on-line' and joining together to form what some particularly hip journals, newspapers and magazines are all-too-willing to call the 'virtual community'. Here we are, in the mid-nineties, and many of us are connected to the Internet, making use of e-mail and checking out the Web pages that form the best part of the global electronic network.

And it's a good thing too, especially for us gamers. The Internet is a great means of getting in contact with people who have similar interests, of finding out what's hot in the gaming world, of getting hold of gaming material, and it's also great for getting involved in roleplaying on a global scale. In this issue of **arcane** we've gone kind of Net overboard, with our complete guide to Internet gaming (that's MUDs and MOOs to you) which starts on page 30, and with our lead feature, which takes a very long look at what are currently some of the most popular games – the so-called cyberpunk systems which place our characters in a gritty, hard-boiled future world where corporations run the show and just about everyone is wired into the Net. Check it out on page 22.

"Despite last year's pessimism the RPG industry is once again burgeoning."

As I mentioned in last month's Up Front, the **arcane** team winged its merry way to GenCon, the States' largest gaming convention, in mid-August to meet the people who are making waves in the industry, and to check out what you'll be playing in the next year or so. We had a superb time, though I must admit that the size of the show was somewhat overwhelming, and we're going to tell you all about it – turn to page 54 for that.

Other features which I think you should take a look at as soon as you can include the second part of Phil Masters' series on alternative settings for your fantasy games (this month Phil looks at Greek and Roman cultures, among others – turn to page 37), and Phil Clare's deliberations on exactly how a referee should be able to wing his or her way through a gaming session without any rulebooks, which starts on page 34.

Of course, there are plenty of other features, but you'll have to discover those for yourself...

Because GenCon has only just happened, this month is a bumper one for reviews. There were new games a-plenty at the show, including TSR's first new system for many years (*Dragonlance: Fifth Age,* reviewed on page 66), *Fading Suns* from Holistic Design (which receives the **arcane** Seal of Approval on page 62), and the long-awaited *BattleTech: 4th Edition* (on page 64).

This sudden rush of new games systems (and yes, there are yet more which we've had to hold over until next month) is again fantastic news for the roleplaying hobby. Despite last year's pessimism about the effect that the collectable card game market was going to have on roleplaying, it would seem that the RPG industry is once again burgeoning. Our hobby is picking up new gamers, and fresh blood is always fantastic news – this was more than evident at GenCon; there were many, many new roleplayers who had come into the hobby through the CCG 'back door'. Evidence, perhaps, that rather than doing harm to roleplaying, CCGs have in fact done it a great deal of good.

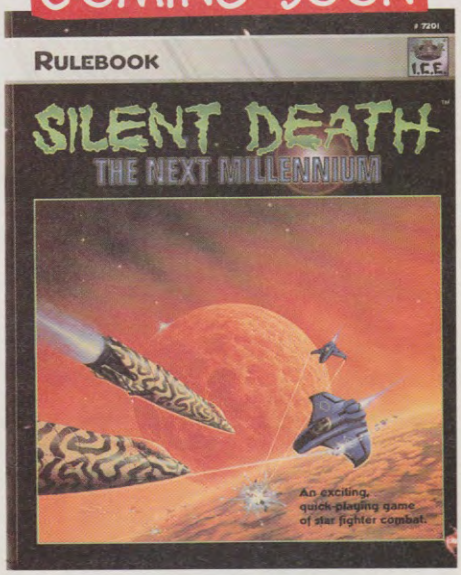
Paul Pettengale
Editor

DESPATCHES

ARM TORPEDOES!!!

ICE revamps its space combat system with a new edition.

COMING SOON



IRON CROWN ENTERPRISES has released a new, updated version of *Silent Death,* its game of star fighter combat set in the far future of human history. *Silent Death: The Next Millennium* is available as both a Deluxe Edition boxed set containing everything you need to play – the rules, 296 plastic miniatures (including 48 star fighters and special stands), map sheets, a booklet of tables, dice and an introductory scenario booklet – and as a separate rulebook. The game is set 50 years after the original *Silent Death,* and in that time the background has undergone some pretty drastic changes.

"There are several tweaks... and a host of additional rules."

The rules have also been revised and updated. Although the core of the system is much the same, there are several small tweaks and refinements and a whole host of additional optional rules, including black holes, ramming and more. In addition, the new edition includes comprehensive and detailed rules for designing your own starships, along with a highly tuned points-based system to rate them.

To supplement the basic set, ICE has also released no less than three additional books. *Sunrunners,* a Forces book, offers 11 scenarios, two new weapons, six new fighters as well as two non-combat ships. *Warhounds,* a Tech book, provides new rules for Escort class ships, including three scenarios, a campaign, ship design rules, new weapons and six pre-designed Escort ships. Finally, the campaign supplement *Renegades: The Espan Rebellion* features 19 scenarios and a campaign system, six new starships and two new weapons. Look out for a full review of *Silent Death: The Next Millennium* and all three supplements in next month's issue.

Better Dredd than dead

Okay, so it was completely panned by many critics at the time, but we all rather enjoyed the law-enforcing might of Sly Stallone in the *Judge Dredd* movie when it went on general release last year. And now you can enjoy it again and again in the comfort of your own home, because Fox Home Entertainment has just released the widescreen version of *Judge Dredd* on video for £15.99. Splundig etc.

OFF THE EDGE

New rules, scenarios and a stand-alone card game.

ATLAS GAMES

OVER THE EDGE

The strange island of Al Amarja, the setting for Atlas Games' surreal *Over the Edge* RPG, is all set for a bit of a shake-up, because there is a new edition of the game set for a September release. Primarily the changes are cosmetic – in line with many new RPGs, there'll be more terrific artwork, some of which should be full-colour. In addition, there are slight rule modifications, the most significant of which is a reworking of the game's firearms system.

To coincide with the new version of the rules, Atlas Games is releasing *Forgotten Lives,* a collection of six scenarios for *Over the Edge.* We know very little about them, apart from their names: Dreaming on the Verge of Strife, The Furchtegott File, In the SACQ, The Jackboot Stomp, Misplaced Childhood and Party Crashers. A quasi-German theme is seemingly evident.

On the Edge

And there's yet more news from Atlas, this time in connection with its popular *On the Edge* Collectable Card Game (itself a spin-off from the *Over the Edge* RPG system). The next expansion set (which is to be the fourth for the game) has been put on hold, and instead Atlas plans to release *The Chaos Plague,* a stand-alone game which is still based on Al Amarja, but which is non-collectable. Just like the company's recent *Lunch Money* game (see the review in **arcane** 8), all of the cards will come in the box when bought. More information and a review to follow, as soon as we can lay our hands on it...

Doctor Who goes 25mm

Harlequin Miniatures has announced that it has gained a license from the BBC to produce a complete range of *Doctor Who* miniatures and games. Work has already begun on the first Daleks, Cybermen and UNIT trooper figures, and the first game – a tabletop wargame in which the Doctor and his UNIT allies clash with invading Cybermen – is at an early stage of design.

Harlequin is also gearing itself up for the release of its first game system, *Raven*. A fantasy wargame designed to complement the company's impressive range of miniatures, *Raven* promises full battle rules, a detailed magic system, full army lists and even an introductory scenario to get things started. Interestingly, *Raven* features a move away from the 'one figure – one soldier' concept which is the norm among most fantasy wargames, and towards the 'one figure – dozens (or even hundreds) of soldiers' style which is more common to historical systems, and which allows vast armies to clash without requiring thousands of miniatures.

Raven is a 144-page book, priced £14.99. For more information contact Harlequin Miniatures on 0115 942 2289/942 2119, and look out for the definitive **arcane** review in the near future.

Untouched cards for sale

Virgin Megastores to sell individual cards for top CCGs.

The Marble Arch branch of the Virgin Megastore chain has begun to sell individual cards for a range of the most popular collectable card games, and other branches across the country are considering the idea.

Prices are taken from *Scrye* magazine, and you not only get the card you're after, but also the other cards from the same booster free. The systems available are *Magic: The Gathering*, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*.

The Kingston store and the Oxford Street Megastore do not sell individual cards, but hold trade evenings instead where you can swap and battle it out with other wizards or starship commanders. Oxford Street holds a full-day card session the first Sunday of each month, and has representatives from TSR and Hobby Games present to show off their latest releases and answer any burning questions.

Kingston plans to hold 5.30-7.30pm evening sessions on the 5th and 26th September before shifting to match Oxford Street's Sunday slot, and *Dragon Dice* battles are waged side by side with the card wars.

For more info on these events call Virgin Kingston on 0181 549 9977, Oxford Street on 0171 631 1234 or Marble Arch on 0171 491 8582.

And besides...

British *Traveller* players unite!

Unfortunately, editorial gremlins struck last issue of **arcane**, and the contact information for the British Isle *Traveller* Support group somehow got lost in the lesser void of the dreaded Ethernet Server. Formed in 1995, the British Isle *Traveller* Support group (BITS) is an organisation dedicated to bringing together UK *Traveller* players and referees. The group has been heavily involved in the playtesting of the new edition of Marc Miller's classic science fiction game (see **arcane** 10), and will be organising the official UK launch of the game at EuroGenCon on behalf of Imperium Games.

If you want to find out more, contact Andy Lilly at BITS, 25 Coney Gree, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, CM21 0DA, or e-mail A.S.Lilly@nortel.co.uk

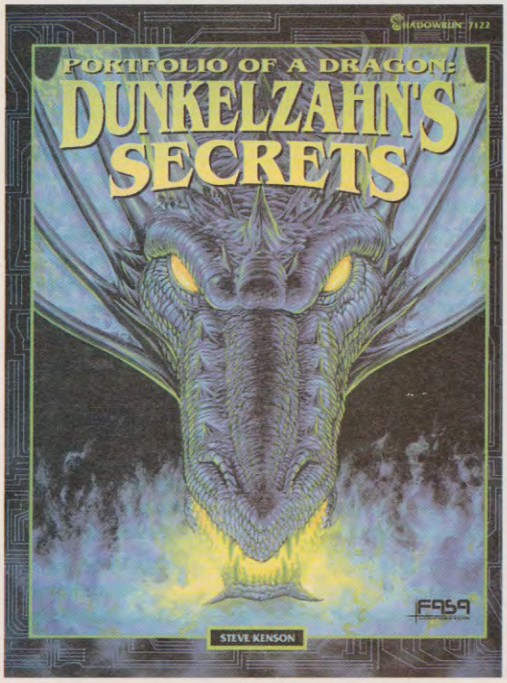
The future of Miniatures?

Newly-formed British company Colonial Miniatures will be releasing a line of 25mm science fiction miniatures and starships in October, and is currently working on a new roleplaying system. You can contact Colonial Miniatures on 0181 262 2190.

A Magical New Year?

Wizards of the Coast has announced that the next expansion set for *Magic: The Gathering* will be released in January of 1997, and will be called *Visions*. Look out for more news in a future issue of **arcane**.

President Dunkelzahn Assassinated!



Will the world of FASA's *Shadowrun* ever be the same?

At last month's GenCon, FASA announced the results of the United Canadian and American States election, which has been this year's biggest event in the *Shadowrun* roleplaying system. The election was decided by the votes of players around the world, using the forms provided in the last three *Shadowrun* releases – *Super Tuesday* (**arcane** 7), *Threats* (**arcane** 9) and *Shadows of the Underworld* (**arcane** 10).

Dunkelzahn, the great dragon, won by a landslide majority. But on the very same night, the newly-appointed president was killed in a violent explosion as he left one of the many inauguration parties held in his honour.

The mystery surrounding the dragon's death and the chaos of its aftermath is described in *Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets*, the latest sourcebook for *Shadowrun*, also released at GenCon. As well as offering details of the assassination and subsequent events, the book includes Dunkelzahn's will, an explosive document which could change the world of *Shadowrun* forever. Look out for a full review in **arcane** 12.

NEWS SPECIAL!!!!

Turn to page 54 for our special **arcane** report on GenCon, where we bring you all the release details and gossip from America's biggest RPG convention, held in Milwaukee.

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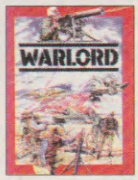

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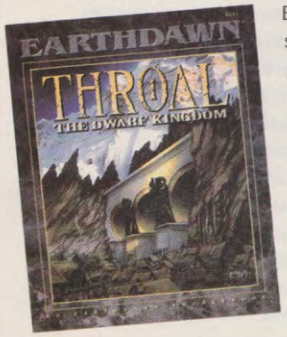
COMING SOON

Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom

All is not well in the capital of *Earthdawn's* Barsaive.

The dwarves of Throal were responsible for uniting the people of FASA's *Earthdawn* fantasy roleplaying system, and the kingdom has since become the political and economic centre of Barsaive. But King Varulus is getting old now, and behind the seeming stability of his rule, rebellion and political intrigue are rife. Old feuds, grudges and personal ambition combine to fuel the plans of the king's enemies.

Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom is a sourcebook for *Earthdawn* which details both the history and current state of every aspect of Barsaive's centre of power. Encompassing no less than seven busy cities, Throal is a place full of potential for roleplaying adventurers of every persuasion, and at an impressive 184 pages this book promises enough background and inspiration for whole campaigns set in and around it.



Look out for a full review in **arcane** 12.

Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar

TSR brings the world of the Gray Mouser to life with a stand-alone game.

Fritz Leiber's series of books describing the adventures of the two roguish heroes, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, formed some of the key inspirations for the original *Dungeons & Dragons* game, and TSR has several supplements and adventures set in Nehwon for *AD&D*. However, this new boxed set is not merely a campaign supplement, but a stand-alone game complete with everything you need to start roleplaying in Fritz Leiber's world apart from dice.

Based on a heavily simplified version of the *AD&D* rules, Fritz Leiber's *Lankhmar* is split into three books. The first describes the rules, the second deals with creating adventures, while the third presents a complete scenario for beginning characters. Of course, there's also one of those nice big glossy maps which are an integral feature of all TSR boxed sets. Look out for a full review of Fritz Leiber's *Lankhmar* in **arcane** 12.

Seymour J Clancy III's great outing

In which Seymour meets the Queen and Robin Hood – and prepares to enter his first Dungeon...

Ah have bin in communiqué-shun with Robert E Langford of Taunton, who informs me that Brian May and The Queen do play with some miniature men that they have found deep in the heart of Robin Hood's Engu-lay-end. Apparently the be-permed popstar also played guitar with a sixpence in a workshop for games in wanton celebration of the diminutive dogs of war of pony-tail notoriety.

Nevertheless, despite the damaging discreditation of this Disciple of the Deity of Derivative Ditties as documented in the dispatch with which ah have been delivered, the Dreadnought of mah Doomwatch continues un-abated. Ah have now successfully infiltrated the magazine that is the **arcane** whay-are have bin invahted to enjoin in one of thay-are advanced stages of *Dodgy Barnets & Dorian Modes* – wherein ah shall play a cleric/assassin who shall RAIN DOWN THUNDER upon the MULTITUDE so that all shall perish before me. Ah have also taken control of thay-are supply of T-shirts, which ah shall distribute freely to those who do ayed me in mah CREWSADE to expose the SINS OF HOLLYWOOD (as ah have done in previous issues of **arcane**, which can be obtained bah turning to pay-edge 57, ahem). Readers may also wish to purchase further issues of this magazine, if only for the porpoise of plotting its demise, ahem... *(Or you could turn to page 60 and take advantage of our great subscription offer – Ed.)*

Conventions

The main events taking place over the next few months.
Convention diary

22nd September Spelbreker
10am-6pm. 100 BFR (£2) – and featuring a Type II *Magic* tournament, *Go* and a White Wolf demo team, among much, much more. This is not specifically a roleplaying convention, but the accent is very much on playing games of all kinds, and English will be widely spoken. Inventors are especially welcome; they will get a free stand and can crash at Johan's. Contact: ***Johan François*** at Wilgenpark 7, 9900 Eeklo, Belgium, ☎ **0032 9/378.12.65** or **fax 378.13.70**

17th-20th October
Internationale Spieltage – Spiel '96
Forget the Oktoberfest – the 14th International Games Day in Essen, Germany celebrates all types of gaming including fantasy, science fiction and adventure roleplaying. This is Germany's biggest convention for buying and selling games. There will also be the chance to play what's on offer and you should be able to find groups playing in English. Entrance fees start at DM 15 (£6) for a day pass, but there are concessions. ☎ **0049 228/342273** or **342712**

26th October
Nameless '96
At Victoria Hall, Station Rd, Harrow, Middx – *AD&D, Magic, Marvel Super Heroes* and more. £3.50 (£3 RPGA) Contact: ***Darrell Impey,*** 14 Sandow Cres, Hayes, Middx ☎ **0181 573 9042** or e-mail: mblade@mblade.demon.co.uk

26-28th October
Gaelcon 96
The Irish Games Association's 8th International Convention takes place at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin. Contact: ☎ **+353 1 7012359**, e-mail: droe@telecom.ie Web: http://indigo.ie/~renraku/gaelcon.html

8-10th November
Clan Amber 96
Residential convention for the diceless RPG *Amber* at the Holiday Inn Garden Court, Edinburgh. ***Nicky & Alan Cannon*** ☎ **0131 4476124**, 70/5 Craighouse Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 5UN

Famous for 15 minutes

For the second month running, 15 Minutes is indebted to *The Independent*, where the subject of roleplaying appeared once again in the lefty broadsheet on Monday 19th August. An article about MENSA, the high-IQ society for people who need other people to know how brainy they think they are, mentioned that the club for clever clogs boasts its very own 'Special Interest Group' for members who are more interested in *Dungeons & Dragons* than in working out how to get three men and a dog across a river in a coracle.

So, in the interests of our readership, we rang them to see if we could get a game.

Unfortunately, after much line holding and being transferred to several blithering boffins in Wolverhampton, who each in turn sheepishly muttered that they were sorry but they didn't know, it transpired that MENSA doesn't actually have a phone number for its Special Interest Group, though they were pretty sure that they do play *Dungeons & Dragons*. And thus our morning of investigative journalism ended in bathos.

We'd like to see that lot try to get across the Northern Wastes.

Meanwhile, Sarah Singleton of Chippenham wins an **arcane** T-shirt for bringing our attention to Fleet Street's developing interest in roleplaying. So, tomorrow morning, why not forget about trying to beat your personal best for completing the crossword while simultaneously eating a bowl of cornflakes, and instead scour the press for items that could provide you with a fabulous **arcane** T-shirt to wear.

Send your findings to:
15 Minutes, arcane, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW
Or e-mail us at:
arcane@futurenet.co.uk

COMING SOON

Star Wars: Live-Action Adventures

Tired of sitting around that old table?

The *Star Wars* roleplaying game from West End Games does a great job of recreating the unique atmosphere and feel of the superb movies on which it is based. But for those players looking for a bit more interaction in their roleplaying, West End has just released *Star Wars: Live-Action Adventures*, a live-action roleplaying (LARP) system which complements the tabletop game.

Star Wars: Live-Action Adventures is based around a simplified version of the standard *Star Wars* system, with several modifications and adjustments to take into account the different requirements of a LARP game. As well as the rules themselves and a complete character generation system, the book is packed with advice on setting up and running LARP adventures and even has a whole chapter dedicated to costumes, props and sets (including *Blue Peter*-style hints on building your own Light Sabres and Blaster Rifles from odds and ends). Things are rounded off by a full-length introductory adventure designed for about ten players which can be played in a single large room.

As well as acting as a perfect introduction to LARP for newcomers, *Star Wars: Live-Action Adventures* also promises experienced hands many useful tips and suggestions. You can find out how good it is in **arcane** 12, where there'll be a full review.

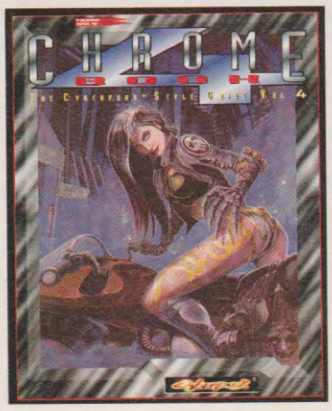
COMING SOON

Chromebook 4

Get your shopping lists ready, cyberpunk fans...

The *Chromebook* series of books for R Talsorian's *Cyberpunk 2020* system have proved to be consistent best sellers to players and referees alike, and *Chromebook 4* (which will be reviewed in **arcane** 12) looks likely to be no exception, with 80 pages of new gadgets, weapons and other toys.

Highlights of the book include Thermite-In-A-Tube (you never know when it might come in handy), the MacLaren/Jaguar XJ220C-P Police Interceptor (arguably the coolest police car ever), and an exhaustive look at *2020* fashion and armour. What more could a budding cyberpunk want?



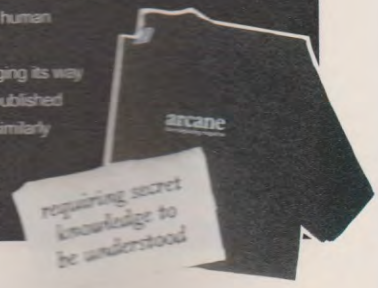
CARD OF THE MONTH

Hillary Clinton

Having America's Lady Macbeth in your deck gives +2 on any attempt to control Bill, Congressional Wives or Democrats and +6 to take direct control of these groups, which can be no bad thing. Play that killer combo on your opponent and watch him cringe as he imagines that nice couple from Washington obscuring the ever-increasing flow of the River of Big Business and its relentless erosion of the basic living conditions of the poor, who are forced to eke out an existence on its swollen banks.

INWO players will be extremely relieved to hear that Steve Jackson Games has no plans to print a Socks the Cat card, but it would be nice to be able to counter a Bill/Hillary play with a Ralph Nader, nominated candidate of the US Green Party – thereby splitting the anti-Republican vote in California and leaving the archaic political duopoly with no recourse but to radically re-think its inhumane policy of wealth creation at the eventual expense of the sustainment of human society as we know it.

Meanwhile, an **arcane** T-shirt is winging its way to Johnny Lambert of Charlton. Any other published nominations for Card of the Month will be similarly rewarded. Send your offerings to **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. We'll send them back.



COMING SOON

Heavy Gear: Technical Manual

By 6132AD technology is capable of some extremely impressive feats...

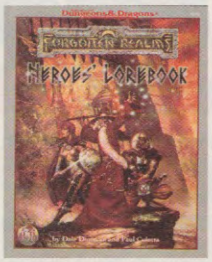
Dream Pod 9's *Heavy Gear* system, which allows for both straight miniatures battles and roleplaying, continues to go from strength to strength. The company intends to release a supplement each month well into 1997, and the first of these, the *Heavy Gear: Technical Manual*, will be available soon.

The book takes an in-depth look at the science and technology of Terra Nova, the war-torn planet where the game is set, and its application to the weapons systems of the game. The subjects covered include materials, electronics, medicine, Heavy Gears and vehicles. As well as a host of background material there's a full vehicle design system, complete rules for repairing and modifying technology in a *Heavy Gear* campaign, and no less than 23 (!) new types of ammunition for projectile and missile weapon systems. Look out for the full review in **arcane** 12.

Heroes' Lorebook

Gasp in awe at Elminster's *AD&D* game stats.

The next release for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons' Forgotten Realms* campaign setting, *Heroes' Lorebook* (which will be reviewed in **arcane** 12) features the game statistics for all of the major *Forgotten Realms* heroes previously



introduced in novels and supplements. Included are such famed characters as the mage Elminster, Drizzt Do'Urden, Alias and many, many more. Nearly all of them are of truly frightening levels, and laden down with more magic weapons, armour and all kinds of other goodies than you could shake a caber at.

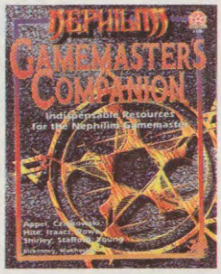
As well as all of the characters from *Hall of Heroes* (published in 1989), there is a wide range of new heroes detailed, many of whom have never been featured in a game supplement until now. Considering that all of this, plus a few new spells and various unique items, fills all of 160 pages, it's scary to think what a collection of the bad guys would be like...

Nephilim Gamemaster's Companion

Running a campaign about incredibly powerful immortals just got easier.

Chaosium's *Nephilim* roleplaying system casts the players as the powerful, immortal beings of the game's title, struggling for enlightenment while avoiding the plots of secretive occult societies which seek to enslave Nephilim and steal their precious powers.

The *Nephilim Gamemaster's Companion* is a 96-page book designed to ease the life of any *Nephilim* referees who are feeling the pressure of trying to run a campaign featuring these powerful beings. As well as an alternate history of the universe, new rules for artifacts and sentient relics, and a bestiary of new elemental creatures, the book also features several sections of advice for referees. There are tips on starting and running a *Nephilim* campaign, techniques for plotting scenarios and creating non-player characters, guidelines for using tarot cards to generate random plots and character personalities, and a fully-detailed campaign setting based around the San Francisco Bay Area (home of Chaosium itself). **arcane** will bring you a definitive review in next month's issue.



COMPO WINNERS

Book – ah, prize!

Rob Barrett of Leamington Spa, Graham Lunt of Newbury, J Matthews of Bournemouth, K McCarron of Wallasey, Phil Nicholls of Gorleston, Martin Norris of Stockport, Bernard Ogden of Winchcombe, Sam Perry of Barnet, Terry Skinsley of Peterborough and Sarah Williams of York.

There's more chance of martians landing than England winning the next World Cup

Greg Aldridge of Peterborough, Bob Baker of Chandlers Ford, Paul Hodgson of Chester, Tim Jones of Abergavenny, Justin Kruyer of Harlow, James Paul of High Wycombe, Edmund Proctor of Crayford, Andrew Smith of Walsall, Philip Thompson of Gateshead and Dave Worrall of Ashton\Lime.

next month in arcane

THE VOTES ARE IN...

Do you take any notice of politics? No, then you ought to. Interjecting some political intrigue into your campaigns can liven them up no end, and in next month's cover feature we're looking at how you can do just that.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

We're taking you on a trip around your campaign worlds in our look at how road movies are the perfect inspiration for a distinctly different style of gaming.

TEN GAMES WE'D LIKE TO SEE

The **arcane** team gets together and discusses what would make the perfect game for every genre. And we don't get at all silly. Honest.

Plus, our refreshing mix of inspirational features, spot-on reviews, up-to-the-minute news and lots more besides.

arcane 12 will be on sale Friday 4th October

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COLUMN

Starships and Stockbrokers

Why is there such a shortage of ordinary people in RPGs? Are our everyday lives really that uninspiring?

ANDREW RILSTONE

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

MOST RPG CHARACTERS are larger-than-life, comic-strip stereotypes. The average fantasy world must be simply chock-a-block with all sorts of artisans and merchants, but we only ever seem to hear about the wizards and warriors in our games. What about the guy who polishes Sir Lancelot's shining armour, or shovels up the muck behind his horse? There are plenty of science fiction games which deal extensively with ray-gun touting star troopers in far-fetched galactic empires, but I don't think there's ever been one in which the player characters are scientists or astronauts, or which lets them find out what everyday life on an alien colony would really be like.

There are also plenty of games set in the present day, but even there you never seem to bump into Joe Average. *Call of Cthulhu* characters do start out as the sort of people you might conceivably meet on a Saturday afternoon in McDonalds, but they pretty soon go completely mad, or die in terrifying circumstances, or both. Psycho-angst games such as *Vampire* and *Nephilim* focus on pallid outcasts, who are driven by bizarre urges and pursue all manner of mysterious agendas. If you've ever come across anyone like that in real life, then you must go to better parties than I do.

Whatever the setting, RPG characters always seem to turn out as adventurers – rootless, orphan wanderers who live on the fringes of society and spend an inordinate amount of time getting into fights. If roleplaying games are meant to be as unlimited as our imaginations, then it's a shame that our imaginations are so limited. 'Oh dear,' you are probably saying at this point, 'Andrew has missed the point yet again. We play roleplaying games for fun. We play gun-touting adventurers precisely because they are *not* ordinary people. The object of the exercise is to escape from reality. Who on earth wants to fantasize about being a stockbroker or a road sweeper?'

But hang on a minute. Surely even a stockbroker can have an interesting time. The author Michael Ridpath says that he took the most exciting thing that had ever happened to him in the City (a large bond trade that went wrong), exaggerated it to the nth degree, and turned it into the first chapter of his book, *Free To Trade*. Presumably, the book wouldn't have become a best-seller if a lot of people hadn't found the story compelling.

"If you think someone has to carry a big gun to be interesting, you need to reconsider."

On the other hand, I imagine that the life of the average *Star Wars* rebel would actually be pretty boring to roleplay. Maintenance work on your X-Wing fighter, filling out copious amounts of paperwork for the rebel high command, flying routine patrols... Even in the movies, Han Solo seems to spend a lot of time just pottering around in the engine room. But you don't concentrate on that in your RPG. Whether the characters are stockbrokers or star heroes, you look for the interesting and unusual moments in their lives and make them the basis of your scenario. That's what 'storytelling' means. Anyway, there are lots of 'ordinary' people who have much more fascinating jobs than brokering stocks: doctors, lawyers, police officers, journalists, politicians...

'Aha,' you say, 'but that wouldn't work. Any fool can pretend to be Conan. All you have to do is say, "Die, black-eyed Phoenician scum," and "I swing my double-handed sword." Politicians and heart surgeons have extremely specialised professional skills which the player simply doesn't know anything about. How are you supposed to roleplay that?'

But surely roleplaying games have been addressing this problem for decades. I don't have the faintest idea how to perform a heart transplant, but then I don't have the slightest idea how to change a dilithium crystal on a star destroyer either. (Come to that, I don't know the correct way to swing a sword.) But it doesn't matter – that is what we have dice, rules systems and referees for. In any case, you don't need a first aid certificate to understand *Casualty*, or a law degree to watch *Murder One* – but they seem to make compelling television all the same. Why not compelling RPGs, too?

I'm not trying to be any sort of kill-joy, here. Most of my favourite characters are swashbucklers, too. But once in a while I like to do something else. I can imagine a campaign about Harold the apprentice blacksmith, who tries to set up shop in the big city. I can think of lots of interesting stories about how he gets hassled by the Blacksmith's Guild. I can think of any number of interesting NPCs who might pass his ship. I can imagine hours of amusing play about how he fumbled his role as a blacksmith and messed up the shoe on Conan's horse.

If you think that someone has to carry a big gun and get into fights to be interesting and worthy of your roleplaying time, then I think you need to reconsider your opinion. I may not drive a Peugeot, but I do think that there's no such thing as an ordinary person.

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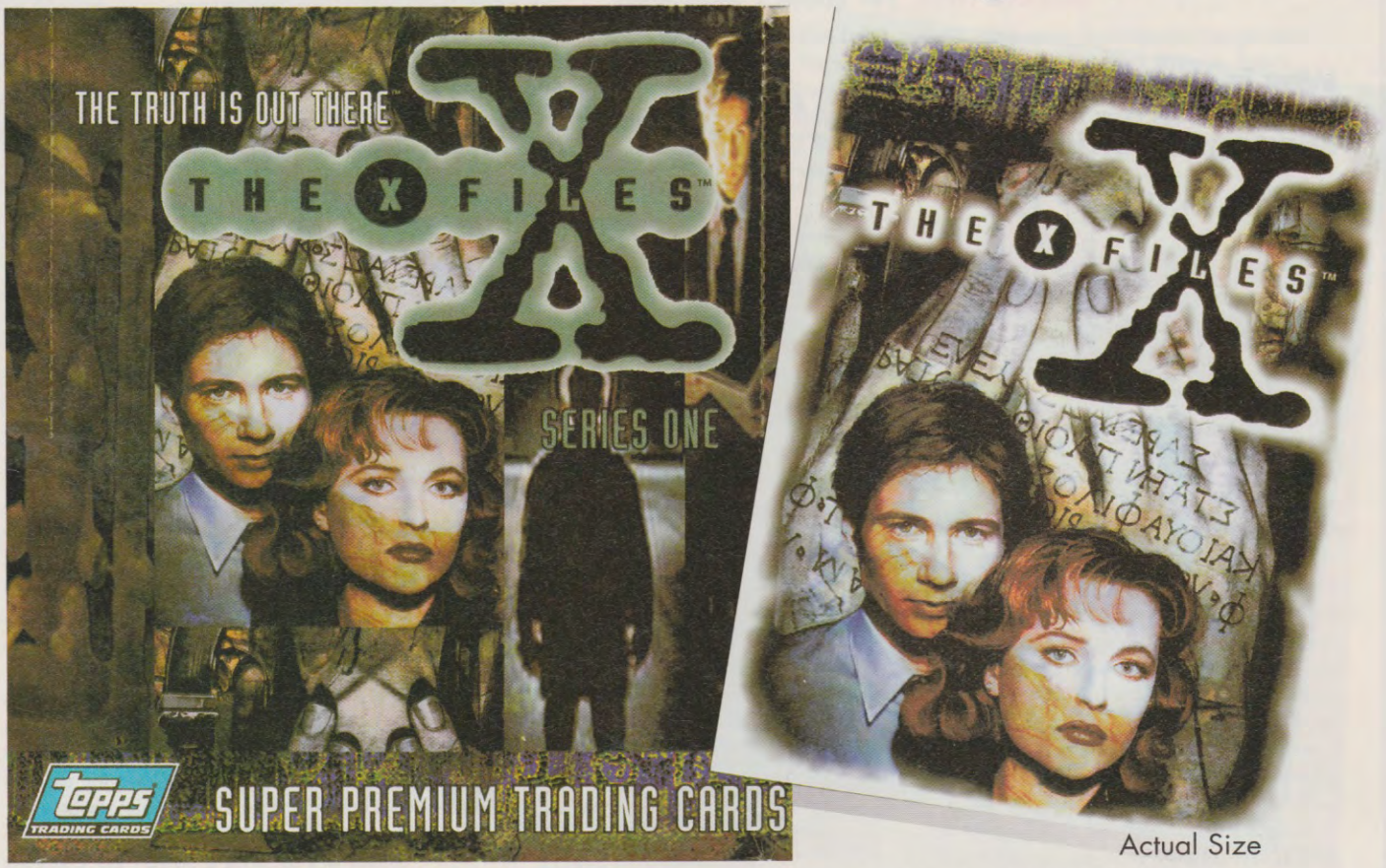

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COLUMN

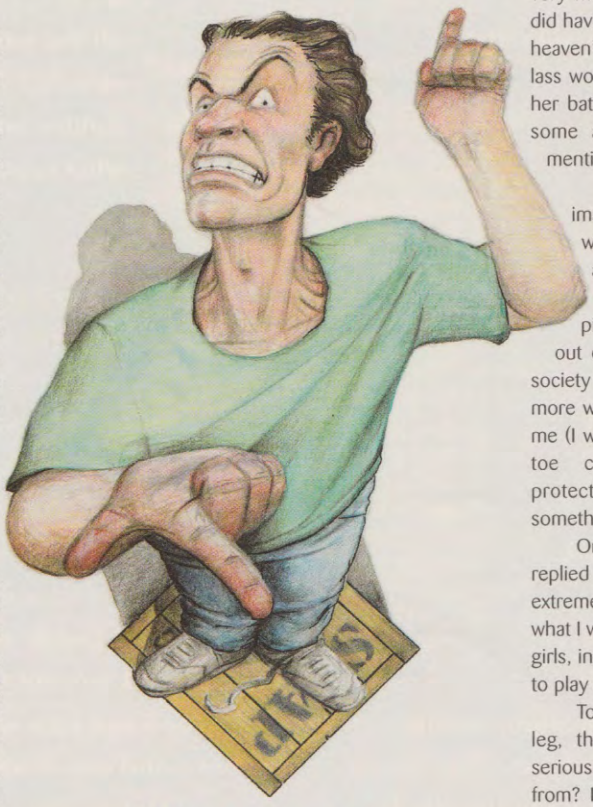
On The Soapbox

Just why is it that whenever women are portrayed in fantasy art, they're virtually always buxom blondes who like wearing nothing but a bikini? Lynne Wilson from Toronto despairs...

NOW, I DON'T CONSIDER myself a feminist, more of an equal opportunities person of the female persuasion. And that doesn't mean politically correct either. Over the last few years it's been obvious that the number of women attending roleplaying events has been growing considerably. And it's no doubt a good thing, too. But this mini-rant isn't about women in roleplaying as such. There will always be a smattering of spotty, ignorant oiks in anoraks who intimidate women out of roleplaying because they're not exactly sure what a woman is, but on the whole, I don't think that's too much of a problem any more. My main concern is the ridiculous and offensive depiction of women in the fantasy environment.

I suppose the word 'fantasy' doesn't exactly help matters. There, on the covers of all those wonderful fantasy roleplaying supplements by you-know-who, are scantily-clad buxom gals who would have severe balance problems in high winds. Modesty demands that their fleshiest bits are tidily hidden behind two saucepan lids and a bit of shammy leather, but other than that it's usually a six foot blonde twig with flesh as far as the eye can see. Perhaps you could say I'm jealous of these seemingly intellectually-challenged depictions of women, not being of the stick insect persuasion myself (I know that's what you're thinking), but I can assure you that isn't the truth.

What really worries me is the lack of imagination and variation in the representation of women in fantasy art. If you look at the depictions of men, you see the whole range – tall, short, fat, thin, old, young, ugly, handsome, you can find all sorts of different characters. All right, so you occasionally come across the Tarzan/Conan pieces, but they're certainly not in the majority and neither are they on the front cover of nearly all the books. The only other female type you see besides our blonde chain-mail bikini babes is the old village crone. Now come on, how fair is that?



"Your average northern barbarian lass would freeze to death if you believed Larry Elmore's vision of womanhood."

To all those people who used to argue historical accuracy with me about not wearing very much while fighting – well okay, the Picts did have a habit of going about sky-clad. But for heaven's sake, your average northern barbarian lass would freeze to death before she even got her battle axe out of its holder if you believed some artists' somewhat convenient, not to mention restricted, vision of womanhood.

And the other worry I have is about the image these pictures give to young women who want to get into roleplaying. I found it a little off-putting at first, but soon learnt to simply ignore it. But what do these pictures say to other women? I was helping out on the recruiting stand for my old LRP society in Durham one year in an attempt to get more women to join. Two people came over to me (I was dressed in my scout gear – head-to-toe clothing with built-in anti-bramble protection) and asked if roleplaying was something women were allowed to do!

Once I'd picked myself up off the floor, I replied that yes, we were allowed to and it was extremely good fun. They questioned me as to what I was dressed as, so I told them. One of the girls, in obvious shock, said, "So you don't have to play a prostitute or a barmaid then?"

To all of you who think they were pulling my leg, they weren't, they were being deadly serious. And where did they get this sorry idea from? I can't prove it, obviously, but I have a nasty suspicion that the depiction of women in fantasy art had a lot to do with it – what other explanation could there be?.

Things are definitely improving – not all companies use that stuff now. But if we need an image overhaul as roleplayers, the way the industry depicts women would be a good place to start. And if the companies involved care about encouraging women to join in, maybe they should employ some female artists.

ON THE SOAPBOX is your page – it's where we give you the opportunity to get something off your chest (as long as it's to do with the gaming industry, of course). The views expressed by you on this page aren't necessarily the views of arcane, or of the arcane editorial team. If you'd like to have your say, send in a piece of around 700 words long to: On the Soapbox, arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Or e-mail it to: arcane@futurenet.co.uk.

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons® Game

TOMES™

The Rod of Seven Parts

Legend

The ancient *Book of Artifacts* reads:

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"Ever since that time, agents of the Queen have been ordered to seek out the *Rod* at any cost. It is rumored that if she regains all the parts, she can use the reconstructed *Rod* to find the Wolf-Spider and return him to her side, whereupon the wars will begin anew."

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TOMES
THE ROD OF SEVEN PARTS

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PLAY-BY-MAIL

On a quest

There are hundreds of play-by-mail games for you to choose from, so how do you make the right decision? In the second installment of our all-new PBM column, Matthew Green looks at *Quest* from KJC...

WELCOME ONCE AGAIN TO THE NOW regular spot in **arcane** dedicated to gaming via the great British postal service. We'll be taking a look at some of the very best PBM games out there, just waiting for you to get involved, and we'll also be offering advice and tips from successful PBMers. Also, we'll be following the exploits of various members of the **arcane** team in the games that they've recently subscribed to.

In this month's installment we take a critical look at *Quest,* one of the most successful play-by-mail games ever produced, and we're taking a brief trip into the world of PBM, seeing if we can't unearth some of the latest news regarding this steadily growing aspect of the roleplaying hobby.

QUEST

KJC Games, free start-up, £1.85 per turn

Quest is possibly one of the most widely played fantasy PBMs in the world, with games now being operated in an impressive ten countries. It's a popular game, and one that is ideal for players who are new to play-by-mail. There are currently at least 14 games of *Quest* running in this country alone, and each of these has a total of 1,000 players – try fitting that many people around your favourite gaming table.

New players start with a carefully selected party of just six characters, and about 1,500 gold coins to purchase some basic weapons and equipment. You also receive a game newsletter and a few pages of historically important events which have occurred in whatever game you start in. These include details of which major alliances have come to rise or fall, and which towns and cities have been taken over as headquarters for notorious adventuring parties.

If you are going to be starting *Quest* yourself, remember to read these documents carefully so that you can work out which groups are the most powerful, evil, good, or whatever else it is that might make them appeal to you, and then attempt to make contact. One of the most wonderful things about this particular game is the way that alliance leaders (other players) will often give you gold and possibly magic items to help beef up your party, which will in turn increase the strength of their respective alliance. However, there's absolutely nothing to prevent you from setting up your own organisation by recruiting other players to your own banner.

If all this talk of alliances doesn't appeal to you in the slightest, then fear not, there is more than one way of playing this game. Some players are very reclusive, and have their parties wander off into the wilderness by themselves for years of adventuring, slowly but surely becoming ever-more powerful than the town and city-based groups, which always seem to be battling it out in the inter-alliance wars.

Whichever way you want to play it, *Quest* is a golden opportunity for you to really test yourself against all the odds. If you are a particularly skilled player you will soon rise to impressive prominence in your game and gain a great deal of respect and admiration, not to mention jealousy, from the other 999 players who are out there adventuring with you.

SPECIAL OFFER!

KJC is still offering ***arcane*** *readers a free start-up pack, consisting of the rule book and first three turns. Future turns are competitively priced at just £1.85. For your free pack, write to:* **KJC Games, FREEPOST, Thornton Cleveleys, FY5 3BR**

PBM news

Cities of Olynthus **is a new release this month from Timewyrm. Set in an ancient world of Greek-Egyptian style history and mythology, each player controls a small nation and a number of characters. There is plenty of opportunity to explore and adventure, but the focus is on the development of your nation. For details contact: Timewyrm, 37 Wendover Court, Western Avenue, North Acton, London W3 0TG.**

Another new release is *Asteroid Wars* from Jason Oates. This fairly simple sci-fi game lasts only ten turns, so could be ideal for anybody who's unsure about starting a PBM game that is designed to take much longer. In this game, each player takes the role of an asteroid base commander – war has broken out throughout the belt, and the ten turns represent the time that it takes Earth to re-establish communications. For more information, write to: Jason Oates, 6 St Georges Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA.

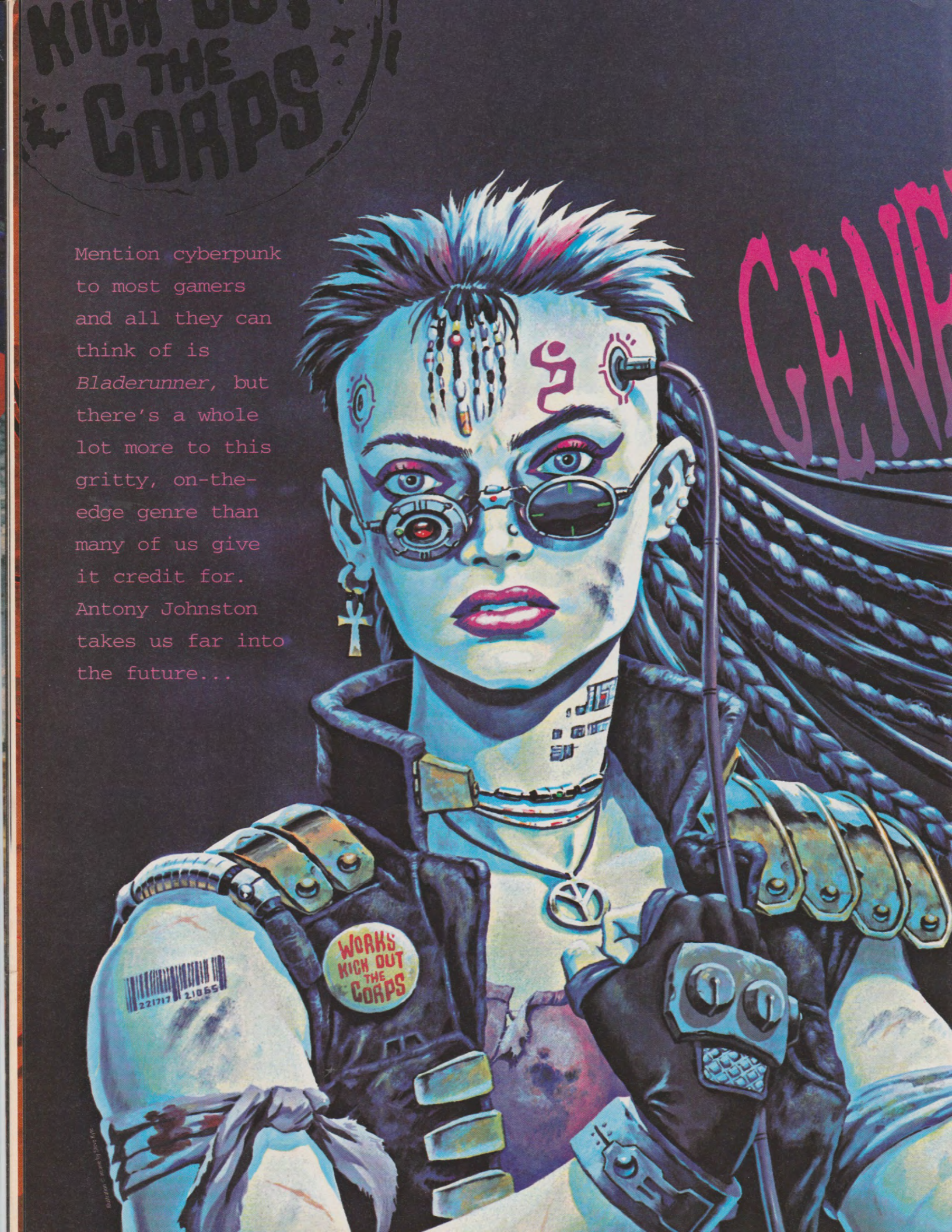
The Journals

This month we reveal that your editor, Paul Pettengale, has just started playing *It's a Crime,* also by KJC Games. Now, why is it that he has chosen a game where he plays a mob boss of a crazed New York street gang, hell bent on taking control of the Big Apple? Let's just say he gets a kick out of this sorta thing.

Journals will be written about how we are getting on in our PBM games as soon as it is safe to do so. If we report too soon, it'll make all the bluffing too difficult, and most PBM players have an addiction to killing off game positions that are being played by reviewers. But stay tuned for some serious action next month...

Drop us a line

If you have any PBM-orientated questions or comments please drop us a line at arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. We are particularly interested to hear from any players who have recently won games, or those of you who have cunning tips to share with other arcane readers.


KICK OUT THE CORPS
GENE
Mention cyberpunk to most gamers and all they can think of is *Bladerunner*, but there's a whole lot more to this gritty, on-the-edge genre than many of us give it credit for. Antony Johnston takes us far into the future...
WORKS KICK OUT THE CORPS

RATION HEX

When William Gibson wrote the words, "The sky above the port was the colour of a television, tuned to a dead channel," he was starting something the enormity of which perhaps even he couldn't have possibly imagined. He was kick-starting a brand new genre in science fiction, a hard-hitting glimpse into a future that's all the more real because we're slowly creeping towards it.

Later in his first book, *Neuromancer*, he coined the term 'cyberspace' – a term which is now commonly used with reference to the Internet (then, in 1984, the Internet was, of course, still a marginal rather than mainstream utility), and from this term came another, 'cyberpunk'.

Cyberpunk is the word which is now used to describe the entire sub-genre of SF that Gibson helped to create (yes, there were others – see below). It's a genre which has spilled over into film, theatre, music and, of course, roleplaying games. There are a number of roleplaying systems which cover this dark vision of a near future, where mega-corporations rule the world, and people are seen as little more than a commodity just waiting to be exploited, and throughout this feature we're going to be telling you exactly why you should be playing them. But first of all, what precisely is cyberpunk?

Jacking In

Cyberpunk proper started in the early 1980s as a literary movement. The most famous novel of the period is indeed *Neuromancer*, a hellish vision of humanity losing its way and of the evolution of the Matrix (a kind of Internet come to life). But while Gibson deserves credit for bringing cyberpunk to the masses, there were others before him, such as John Brunner's *Shockwave Rider* and *Jagged Orbit*, or Niven and Pournelle's *Oath of Fealty*.

Gibson, along with Sterling, Cadigan, Maddox, Rucker and others, brought us what Gardner Dozois eventually coined 'cyberpunk': gritty, hard-edged SF, based not on the utopian visions of Hugo Gernsback or the interstellar space wars of L Ron Hubbard, but instead on a dystopia, a near-future nightmare of dehumanization.

The governments have surrendered control to the Corporations, because profit

Some cyber-ideas for cyber-scenarios

The best inspiration for cyberpunk scenarios is life – watch the news, pay attention to how people interact with one another, listen to opinions and views. Twist a news story slightly, put it in a cyberpunk context, and see what comes out the other end. Or take an opinion and follow it to its logical conclusion, regardless of practicality or morality. The best cyberpunk material rings of familiarity, but twists perceptions and attitudes. Try these for size:

MYSTERY MACHINE

The PCs are hired to guard a truck as it makes its way from their home town to another. The second city is notorious as an anarchist state, and their employer is concerned that the truck's contents ("sensitive medical experiments") don't fall into the wrong hands.

But the crates in the truck are empty – it is the driver who is important. He's a government agent, a one-man army sent to bring down the anarchist leaders, believed to be execs working for the Corp the truck is headed for.

If they arrive without realising the driver is more than just a trucker, they'll be paid and told to make their own way back while the agent starts cracking heads. If they do work it out on the way, the agent might just decide to just waste 'em and to hell with the cover...

NO CHOICE

Ever seen *The Usual Suspects?* Surely the PCs have done enough in their time to merit the vengeance of a Kaiser Shohze-type criminal overlord, who coerces them into doing One Last Job for him...

WE CAN BUILD YOU

One of the PCs is in hospital for some cybersurgery. Going to the bathroom unattended, he hears a totally inhuman sound from the stairwell. Opening it, he sees a pale, hairless humanoid dragging itself up the stairs. It reaches for him but is shot by pursuing security guards, who then open up on the PC!

This could turn into either *Die Hard* in a hospital, or a full-blown corp espionage scenario. What was that thing? Why didn't the guards want the PC to see it? What exactly are they hiding?

One of the most quoted lines from *Neuromancer* is, "the street finds its own uses for things." Bear this in mind. A nailgun is just as effective as a pistol at point-blank range.

rules and the Corps basically Know What You Want far better than you do. In fact they *tell* you exactly what you want. If you want any security in this world you work for the Corporation, live in their apartments, sing their hymns, send your kids to their schools, buy their products and even watch their television shows.

Because here in the future we can quite literally rebuild you. Technology, particularly that of miniaturisation and medicine, has advanced at an alarming rate, too fast for the average person to be able to comprehend. So you let the Corps think for you. You let them keep enormous databases on your eating and drinking habits, as well as your TV-watching habits. You get married to another Corp worker, then let the Corp choose your children's names. Well, everyone needs security.

But you're not average, are you? You're different. You've got that small but indomitable sense of pride in you that says whatever happens you won't break. You'll use their own weapons – the mass media, the hypertech, the information overload – against them. You'll subvert the masses, sabotage the Corp and bring the truth to the people, because you live on the edge, the periphery of society. And from here you can clearly see the rotten core.

"The heroes of cyberpunk are not Buck Rogers or Zorro. They are you and I, normal people trying to survive in a harsh, uncompromising world without losing their identity."

You have the power – the subversive power of the desktop printer and personal global communications. You know that you can make a real difference. The heroes of cyberpunk are not Buck Rogers or Zorro. They are you and I, normal people trying to survive in a harsh, uncompromising world without losing their identity.

If you have Internet access (and every good cyberpunk should) check out these newsgroups: `alt.cyberpunk` `rec.games.frp.cyber` and `alt.cyberpunk.chatsubo`

Sounds like a great starting point for a roleplaying game, doesn't it? Thought so – but before you chose a system to play with and get your players hooked on the idea, you should first immerse yourself in the genre (see the Techno books and Cyberflicks columns on pages 26 and 27). Then carefully consider what *type* of game you want to run – are the PCs struggling street anarchists, rebelling against the authorities, or are they a professional merc team (popular choice), hiring themselves to the highest bidder? Perhaps they're Corporate workers themselves, consumed by an overwhelming lust for power. The might form a police squad, desperately trying to protect the increasingly paranoid and violent populace from themselves. Or perhaps a nomad biker family roaming through radioactive mid-America. The possibilities are simply endless.

Once you've decided on your theme, it's time to buy a system (see the Which system? box on the right), and make sure your players (and the proposed types of characters) are agreeable to all concerned. Take some time to carefully weave your PCs into the world you have chosen. Be sure to give them families, friends, enemies, acquaintances; they should have interesting lives in this world, with duties and commitments to make them consider the consequences of their actions and distract them at inconvenient moments!

Running the edge

Regardless of whether you're running a Corp extraction, a covert netrun or a celebrity scandal, there are certain things that can make or break a cyberpunk game.

The first of these has to be attitude. The PCs should always be looking over their shoulders. NPCs won't fight to the death – they're not stupid! Stand up to the PCs and give them a hard time. A few failed charisma rolls here, a few hostile reaction rolls there...

Second, and closely related, is paranoia. They really are out to get the PCs, and 'they' can be a varied bunch...

Anyone with a known reputation as a hard-ass pipe-hitter is going to be challenged by much lesser guys wanting to gain respect from their peers. A top flight fixer should have that many deals on the go, and such a complicated web of contacts, that *anyone* could bear them a really bad grudge. Medias make enemies as part of their job, and as for nomads and deckers – well, can you say, 'the authorities are looking for you?' Thought so.

Keep the PCs under fire all the time, literally if necessary – they aren't the only ones walking round with jobs to do. Mug them, let them hear vicious rumours about how the dealer they double-crossed last

week has put a contract out on them. They should be sweating profusely every time they turn a corner.

Third is plot twist. Linearity is an all too common criticism of many cyberpunk scenarios, and you should be doing your best to make sure this isn't the case in your games. Say the PCs are hired by a Big Corp to eliminate a biotechnician. But when they do their research, they discover that he's working on a miracle breakthrough in nanotechnology medicine. They decide to make it look like he's dead and collect their fee, but actually let him alive. Here's the twist. The Big Corp put a 'sleeper' in the laboratory several months ago, and this guy tells the Big Corp of the PCs' plan when they approach the biotechie. Soon the PCs are going to be dug into that lab, wondering who sold them out. But that's not all. The Big Corp anonymously tips off the lab owners that the biotechie wants to defect to the Big Corp. So, now the PCs will be under fire from all directions.

Remember, there are at least two sides to every story. Always think through the various alternatives, even if you then return to the very first idea you had. Things are rarely what they initially seem, so always think about your options wisely.

The last consideration is technology. The level of technology in your world will make a huge difference to the game, regardless of which system you use. At its most basic, cyberware and/or heavy body modifications are the staple feature of cyberpunk – enhanced hearing, electronic eyes, reflex boosters and cyberlimbs abound. These should be easily available but not necessarily cheap. Many backstreet 'ripperdocs' are all too willing to give you the new Nikonoptics for half price – and half the chance of the operation being a success.

Computers are the next dilemma. Many cyberpunk games feature 'neural jacking', the process of hooking your brain (via a Cybermodem) directly into the Net, or Matrix, of computer systems worldwide. While there are some excellent cyberpunk novels where computer operation is still done through a keyboard and monitor, the cinematic 'cyberspace runs' are a definite favourite of most players.

Then there are the AIs: sentient computer intelligences which roam cyberspace, akin to gods in their unfathomable machinations. And then there are androids and space travel. Androids will be either slave machines like modern computers, or fully autonomous AIs, which in turn leads to all manner of questions regarding their rights and treatment by humans. If they're fully sentient, and subject to the same laws as us, are they equal citizens? And if they're not subject to the same laws, why not? Check out the film *Bladerunner* for a pretty good set of scenario ideas dealing with androids and their position within society.

Most cyberpunk space travel is restricted to our own solar system or even just our own moon, but interstellar travel is an option some take. Just remember to think your logic through: cryogenic 'hypersleep' chambers for long hauls to the nearest star (which would take over four years to reach, even at lightspeed) are more likely than faster-than-light travel. And what the hell do they use for fuel?

> "Cyberpunk is a dangerous game, and the players should never feel entirely at ease."

Uh-oh, it's the Munchkins

Whichever of the technological levels you decide to incorporate into your game, make sure you don't let the PCs too near it all. Munchkinism, a cute name for powergaming, is a problem for many a cyberpunk referee. With body modifications so readily available and firepower so, well, powerful, it is easy for a referee to be confounded by players who arm (and armour) themselves to the limit, dealing with every problem by shooting at it.

Don't let them get away with it – there are plenty of ways to dissuade your PCs from 'munching out'. Most PCs with tons of cyberware will trade points from their empathy for chrome. What they forget is that they will become cold fish as they progressively lose their humanity.

Characters like this will be impossible to relate to, and behave in a computer-like way. Normal people will feel unnerved by them and shun them accordingly. They will be completely unable to gain the trust of these uneasy people and will consequently be alienated by society.

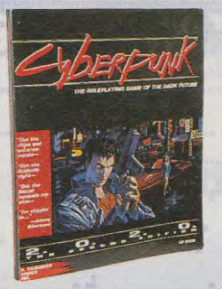
Racism is a rare thing in cyberpunk (though it's tackled particularly well in the *Shadowrun* system), but human instinct leads us to fear what is different, and the majority of people won't have more metal than meat. Make sure they react in a fitting manner. Men who look more like robots should not be able to persuade complete strangers to lay down their life for them. If that isn't enough (and unfortunately for most munchkins it isn't), just remember there's Always Someone Better Than You. Whizkid deckers don't stand a chance against a decent AI, and hotshot mercs can always be beaten by someone more cunning who doesn't oppose them with brute force.

Steal their gear, burgle their apartments. If they treat a young gang member badly, have the whole gang come down after the PCs – that's the whole point of being a brother, right? Frame corporates for decisions they didn't make. Rig mini-mines under the solo's mattress. When he's wise to that rig them to go off if the mattress is lifted rather than sat on. Short-circuit a black market chip in the decker's cybermodem. Don't let up. →

Which system?

So you're hooked, and you want to play. But which system should you use? This isn't an easy decision – there's so much scope in the cyberpunk genre that it really does depend on your style and tastes. Sensibly, though, you have the following choices:

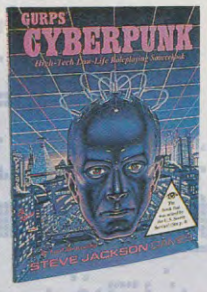
Cyberpunk 2020
by R Talsorian Games. The original and best, though not necessarily for novice roleplayers. *CP2020* is widely supported and is positively bursting at the seams



with hard attitude. It deals with the downside of life; the imagery prevalent is reminiscent of the film *Bladerunner* and PCs are generally hard done by. A 3rd edition is in the pipeline.

Shadowrun (2nd edition) from FASA. Probably better supported than *CP2020*, the main difference here is the setting: fantasy creatures of old have been re-awakened, enabling PCs to play elves, dwarves or even orcs, and magic co-exists with cybertechnology. *SR2* cannot be played as a 'straight' cyberpunk game – many of the concepts and rules simply don't work without the magical element. Its flavour is generally a little lighter and PCs are more powerful than they are in *CP2020*.

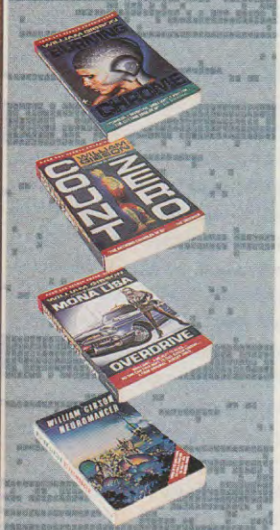
GURPS Cyberpunk
from Steve Jackson Games. Of course, this is absolutely ideal if you already use the *GURPS* system, but it's worth checking out as a sourcebook for other systems too. This is the book that got Steve Jackson Games into hot water



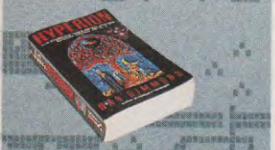
with the US Secret Service (you can read all about it at `http://www.io.com/SS`) and, being from the Illuminated Ones, features conspiracy theory everywhere. The game is certainly realistic and it's also extremely thoroughly researched.

Try to adapt an existing system. There are some other 'pure' cyberpunk systems available, but frankly none of them really cut it in terms of design or support. Fortunately, so long as you're familiar with the genre as a whole, adapting a system you know to cyberpunk isn't difficult at all. Give it a go.

TECHNO BOOKS...



William Gibson **BURNING CHROME • COUNT ZERO • MONA LISA • OVERDRIVE • NEUROMANCER • VIRTUAL LIGHT**



Dan Simmons **HYPERION • THE FALL OF HYPERION**

John Brunner **JAGGED ORBIT • SHOCKWAVE RIDER**

George Alec Effinger **WHEN GRAVITY FAILS**

Bruce Sterling **ISLANDS IN THE NET • SCHISMATRIX • CRYSTAL EXPRESS**

Rudy Rucker **HARDWEAR • WETWARE**

Pat Cadigan **SYNNERS**

Ed Sterling **MIRRORSHADES: THE CYBERPUNK ANTHOLOGY**

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Walter Jon Williams **HARDWIRED • VOICE OF THE WHIRLWIND**

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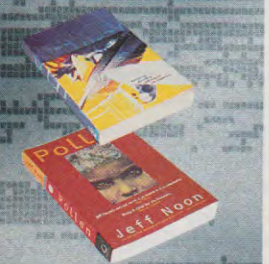


Jeff Noon **VURT • POLLEN**

Cyberspace cowboy

"Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data..."
William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

In cyberpunk, the Internet has mutated into a vast, virtual world in which people roam from city to city, represented by their own personal computerised icon, doing business, researching or just visiting. An icon can look like almost anything and is fully animated, moving as you will it to. If you want to appear to be a ten foot grizzly bear on the Net, go right ahead.

But the main purpose of cyberspace (at least in cyberpunk games) is as the domain of the decker, the netrunner, the cyberspace cowboy. All these terms mean just one thing: someone who uses the Net to crack computers to which they don't have any legal access.

What they do with those computers, or data fortresses as they're commonly known, is up to them. Most steal data and try to sell it to rival Corporations. Some use it for their own research. Some just trash it, destroying wantonly to sabotage the Corp's work. But they're all there to cause havoc.

That's where ICE comes in – Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics. ICE is the data fortress' way of keeping deckers out. It can do this in a number of ways – tracing their line and reporting to the cops, dumping them out of the system, or just blocking access.

Black ICE is the killer, though. Black ICE is usually illegal, but that doesn't stop the Corps using it. Black ICE will fry your brain and leave you flatlined by overloading your neural sensors, causing a complete seizure, or even screwing about with your deck to cause a short circuit that electrocutes you.

If you're playing a cyberpunk game, you'll have to deal with decking at some point. Some referees deal with it by disallowing PC deckers, relegating them to NPCs only. They say netruns take too long and the other players get bored while the decker sits on his own playing virtual chess with the ref, but it needn't be like that. Streamline your rules, reduce the number of programs available – you can't order ICE breakers from Argos, you know. Wing a few dramatic rolls so as not to slow up the action and make sure the other players get involved. A common mistake many refs make is to model their runs on those depicted in *Burning Chrome* and *Neuromancer*, where the action all takes place in cyberspace and the other characters just hang around.

"The essence of punk is change. Out with the old, in with the new, and then out with that when it gets boring. Chaos, a perpetual mutation."

But those characters didn't have people playing them. Yours do, and those players will want to *do* something. So change the script; make sure the run takes place in the heat of the action, during a riot or helping the solos to enter the target's premises without tripping the alarms. Or have the non-decking PCs 'social engineer' the run – that is, create a decoy or distraction to buy time for the decker.

Above all, be cinematic. *Cyberpunk 2020's* system is often criticised for being too much like a wargame, with subgrids and 5-square movement limits. *Shadowrun* wasn't much better until the release of *Virtual Realities 2.0* which contained much better rules that rely more on the decker's abilities than on his equipment, and slim down the number of rolls required to bypass systems. Let's just hope that *Cyberpunk 3*, which is due out sometime soon, will do the same thing.

Treat netruns like you would a car chase – the last thing you want to do is stop halfway through to scour the manual for a table or rule. Keep it fast, fluid and manic. No single netrun should take more than ten minutes, real time, no matter how complicated the task.

Creating an atmosphere

Atmosphere is important in all games, but especially so in cyberpunk. Dimming the lights can work, but extremely bright lighting is just as good for a stark feel.

Encourage your players to dress the part, and bring props – an old PC keyboard is fine for a deck (heavily painted and modified if you really want to go for it), and mirrorshades are a must. Corps can slick their hair back and wear a suit. Solos, don full leathers (or as much as you've got). Nomads, tie a bandanna. Techies should go for overalls and have a toolkit handy. All these things are clichés, sure, but if used sparingly they can really help.

Music is important to a good cyberpunk atmosphere. Opinions on the perfect cyberpunk soundtrack differ vastly, but my preference is for modern techno-ambient (Autechre, Biosphere, FSOL) for street scenes and decking, classical (Mahler, Rachmaninov) for Corp meetings, dance (Prodigy, PWEI) for chases and clubs and the obligatory industrial (NIN, Ministry, Fear Factory) for fights. And check out *Cyberpunx* by Cassandra Complex – six years old and still as relevant as ever.

Don't play them too loud (unless you want to really simulate being in a club) – just enough to be heard clearly. And don't be afraid to experiment. Change your tunes regularly, or the players will get too used to a soundtrack and start to become complacent. Shock them.

Deny the players easy refreshment, too – as Mike Pondsmith *(Cyberpunk 2020's* designer) says, "this is the dark future here; and it can't be accurately portrayed with milk and cookies on the table." Above all, stay sinister. Cyberpunk is a dangerous game, and the players should never feel entirely at ease.

Building a campaign

A word about Mr Johnson. He is the mysterious guy in the black suit with mirrorshades and a briefcase who offers the PCs a job. For your first few games, using Mr Johnson is fine as a way to kickstart the scenario, but he soon wears thin, akin to the old, 'you're all sitting in the Dragon's Head when suddenly...'

Use the PCs own lives to instigate scenarios, after all, who could refuse to help his or her own brother when he gets into big trouble with the Corp/Mafia/gangs? (And for more on how families can be involved in roleplaying scenarios, check out 'It's a family affair' starting on page 58.) If your dealer picks a girl up in a bar, have a jealous ex-boyfriend who just happens to be an executive for a large military Corp start on him. Or sell the fixer some dodgy chips – how many fixers actually check the gear

they're selling? They will after a few angry customers come knocking. See the scenarios ideas boxout on page 24 for some more suggestions.

As for campaigns, cyberpunk can be the easiest or hardest genre in which to run one. The main problem is that cyberpunk PCs, by their very nature, are survivors who tend to trust no-one. Trying to find a new hook that will involve a media, decker, solo, fixer and nomad in every single scenario is not only tough work, it's restricting.

One solution is to make the PCs be part of an established team, whether that be a mercenary unit, a private investigation firm, a news crew or a rock band. There's nothing wrong with this and it certainly works, but be careful because players can often feel 'railroaded' by this approach.

So how do you keep a group of extremely diverse PCs from either killing each other or just wandering off? Probably the best answer is to give the PCs a common enemy (or bond) which unites them despite their differences. Perhaps they all happen to be at the same club when a cyberpsycho goes completely crazy, zeroing people left, right and centre. After the solo takes him down, the medtechie takes a look at him and discovers a chip socket with a burnt-out chip still in. The fixer recognizes it as a batch that came in last week from Antarctica. When they take it to a decker, he discovers that it contains a proprietary chip from a big military Corp which is based in Germany – the crusade against the Corp really has begun now. To keep them interested you might consider letting them find a hitlist in the Corp's data fortress… with all their names included.

This is where your PC's history comes in handy, too. Work that lifepath to the full – cram in as many coincidences and mutual acquaintances to unite the PCs as possible (for more tips on this, see 'Suds & Sorcery' in **arcane** 9 – see page 57 if you missed it).

Make sure the players' actions affect your campaign world. If they haven't paid their rent for three months, they might just find the locks have been changed one day, and their gear starts cropping up in backstreet markets at bargain prices. Or maybe the cleaner is a romantic who dreams of life as a tough guy. Don't leave any of your weapons in the apt when the cleaner's due, or you could come back to a large hole in the wall and a very dead cleaner. Try explaining *that* to the landlord.

Have NPCs react specifically to the PC's actions. Remember, it's a fluid world. Clubs change, people die, kids are born, governments and laws come and go. Take note of throwaway comments players make about your creations – 'Hey, wouldn't it be cool if…?' Maybe it would, so try it.

Cyberpunks are dead!

So says nutty German noise merchant Atari Teenage Riot. But is the genre merely resting or mutating? That's a cyberpunk's job, to stay on the edge and move with the times. But of late, many people have complained that cyberpunk is no longer relevant. They say it's become stale. But that's all rubbish – how many Tolkien fans insist modern fantasy is dead? Thousands of *Lord of the Rings* carbon copies are published every year. People lap them up.

The same is true of cyberpunk, both in books and games. New faces, such as Jeff Noon and Neal Stephenson, have grasped the mantle and are pushing back the boundaries. These people have even less respect for convention than Gibson or Sterling did in 1982, and they'll convince you that the attitude is still relevant.

There's been a bit of a resurgence in cyberpunk-style games recently, too. The success of White Wolf's *World of Darkness* games and *The X-Files* has revived interest in darkness, conspiracy theory and paranoia. R Talsorian is about to release *Cyberpunk 3rd Edition* and FASA is releasing boatloads of material for *Shadowrun 2*.

But scratch the surface and you find some excellent new stuff, too, most of it from small companies – true to the cyberpunk spirit. *SLA Industries*. *Conspiracy X*. *Netrunner* (okay, so it's a CCG, but it's still a game, right?). Ianus has been quietly building the *Night's Edge* series for *Cyberpunk 2020*. More will surely come.

The essence of punk is change. Out with the old, in with the new, and then out with that when it gets boring. Chaos, a perpetual mutation. As technology races forwards at breakneck speed we have to constantly re-assess our lifestyle, our attitudes, our outlook. You can fly anywhere in the world within 24 hours, and send a message to Australia – complete with graphics, sound and even animation – in five minutes. Truly this is a global village.

But there will always be misanthropes, those who feel outcast from society. And there will always be criminals, corruption, narcotics and poverty. When all these factors collide with the cheap, widely available technology of the future, how will they react? As the world changes, so does cyberpunk, perpetually re-evaluating theories. So don't throw out those mirrorshades just yet, put 'em on, play some cyberpunk, and prepare for what is to come.

…and cyberflicks

Here is a short list of some of the most relevant films in the cyberpunk genre. There are, of course, many more titles available. Best book your optics in for a service.

BLACK RAIN

BLADERUNNER

CYBERCITY

DUST DEVIL

GHOST IN THE SHELL

TERMINATOR

JOHNNY MNEMONIC

MAD MAX

RISING SUN

LAWNMOWER MAN 2

ROBOCOP

SPLIT SECOND

Out Of Y

When playing modern-day horror games, players ha
but what happens when they fall over the brink

It has to be one of the greatest roleplaying challenges to face any player: to act out the role of a character who, for whatever reason, has lost his marbles. This strange situation, where you have to try to think like a man who can't think straight, is pretty common in horror roleplaying, especially in that most famous of all horror RPGs, *Call of Cthulhu*. So, how do you go about playing a mad character while still participating in the game and having fun into the bargain?

It has to be said that many referees, especially Keepers for *CoC*, immediately retire characters who have gone insane. This is not a good thing – if the character is so traumatised that he's little more than a dribbling idiot, then fine, it's not much fun playing someone who's holed up in a padded cell wearing a straight-jacket, but there are degrees of madness which can be played and enjoyed, and indeed this should be encouraged by referees.

"Introduce the underlying fear whenever possible."

This article is all about insanity in games, not in real life, so the concepts here are meant to reflect how insanity is best used in games – it is not intended to reflect on real mental illness in any way.

Insanity within games usually starts off with a slight phobia – a character will have had a traumatising experience which has left him with a deep-seated fear of whatever happened. If he was badly wounded by a spider, or saw spiders eat a body, it's likely he will develop an irrational fear of spiders – that's pretty easy to deduce. Playing out a phobia can be done on a number of levels, though – there's the obvious reaction, where the character screams in fright and jumps on the nearest table whenever a spider is seen scuttling across the floor, but irrational fears run deeper.

Panic attack

If you're really scared by something, you end up spending an inordinate amount of time thinking about it. Someone who's petrified of the dentist will spend sleepless nights worrying about tooth decay and dream of teeth falling out, or of agonising sessions under the drill. Any character affected by a phobia should bring it into their everyday lives – they'll suffer panic attacks not just at the sight of what they fear, but of the mere thought of it. The character with a spider phobia will freak out at the prospect of entering an old building simply because spiders might lurk inside.

So, when playing a character with a phobia, even one as simple as a fear of spiders, try to make the most of it, and have some fun. Don't just turn the phobia on when the referee gives rise to a situation which involves a spider, introduce the underlying fear whenever possible.

A somewhat more serious mental illness which is frequently used in horror games is paranoia. Again, this is difficult to roleplay well, but with a little effort it's possible. The best thing to do with paranoia, providing the character doesn't get treatment in the meantime, is to start off with a mild form of paranoia, and gradually increase the pitch of it as the character's fears are realised (as surely they should be when playing a horror game). Paranoia in its mildest form is little more than acute pessimism – the feeling that whatever happens, you're unlikely to succeed in anything you do, or that you're going to be placed in a position where you can't make any positive contribution to the situations you become embroiled in. If someone asks your character whether he's going to be able to get to X location by Y time, he'll be absolutely convinced that he can't – the world is against him as far as he is concerned, and there's nothing he can do to change that.

Paranoia in its more advanced stages shifts the emphasis somewhat. Instead of 'the world' being out to get you, 'they' are out to get you. It's at this point that the

Illustration © arcane by Steve Lillie

OUR TREE

to fight to remain sane more often that to stay alive, insanity? Linda Fowler pulls her mind together...

deluded character is convinced that there's some higher conspiracy which is perverting the world as everyone else sees it – only he knows the truth, and consequently he is always attempting to persuade others of the universal threat which is insurmountable to him as an individual. Everything eventually becomes part of the global conspiracy, organised by some collection of individuals or alien forces, or some malevolent deity. Even the mundane is subsumed in the paranoid's mind, so that everywhere he turns he's confronted by things he can't deal with. 'They' spy at you through the television, 'they' know what you're doing, and there's absolutely nothing you can do about 'them'. If you've ever played West End Games' *Paranoia*, you should be familiar with the phrase 'trust no-one', and nothing should be more real in the mind of the critically paranoid.

DELUSORY MINDS

I once watched a man pretend to kick an invisible cat around a busy street for the best part of a day. This is typical of action performed by schizophrenics – perhaps the most difficult mental illness to play in a roleplaying game – whereby a character's mind suffers from constant delusion and self-perceived visions. Contrary to popular belief, the schizophrenic doesn't necessarily suffer from split personas (indeed, this is more common among manic depressives), but a belief that they live in their own, self-contained world, where the rest of 'reality' is an illusion no different from the other illusions from which they suffer. Within the *Call of Cthulhu* game environment, a character suffering form schizophrenia is likely to see everyone an minions of Cthulhu, in all of their grizzly forms. So convinced are they that their visions are real, they'll gladly explain to all and sundry 'the truth', and that includes any figures of authority. Such a character may quickly become an embarrassment to the rest of the party. Either that, or the perfect scapegoat...

The key to playing a schizophrenic is to act like an odd-ball – come out with sentences which have no bearing on questions asked, and act in an uncontrollable manner. Unfortunately, roleplaying a schizophrenic character is usually short-lived – either you or the referee is almost certainly going to retire the character eventually – so play it for all it's worth as long as it's fun.

Even more serious forms of insanity are, in my experience, best avoided. Yes, it's almost inevitable that if a character in *Call of Cthulhu* discovers too much, or gets too close a look at one of the major beasts from the Lovecraftian mythos, they're going to lose it permanently – that's a risk every investigator has to take – but there's no joy in playing a character who has to be confined for his own safety, and for the safety of others. Insanity should only be used within horror games when it's fun, when it ads something to the game, and when it gives the player a chance to act in a manner which is somewhat incongruous with his or her usual self.

"Act like an odd-ball... in an uncontrollable manner."

A spell of insanity can be good for a character – it gives the player a chance to get some chaos out of their system, to play at being a bit mad for a while, and then to adopt a suitably austere role when the character is finally cured of his mental ills. Often, a player who has roleplayed an insane character for a while comes back to play the saner side of that character with a renewed enthusiasm, and it is for this reason (and, of course, the fact that it can be fun) that a referee should never restrict a player from continuing to play his character if insanity has taken a hold.

One of the strangest things roleplayers enjoy doing is finding all kinds of weird phobias for their characters to suffer from. If you can, take a look at issue 89 of *White Dwarf* (May 1987) for some absolute beauties, including Lyssophobia – the fear of insanity...

Remember, the most rewarding way to go mad is to do so gradually – let the fears and tensions slowly build in your character before he finally flips and starts frothing at the mouth.

FIRE ON TH

Stuck for a game? Then why not join the global community of gamers who are battling it out on-line? Sara Edlington immerses herself in the worlds of MUDs and MOOs to bring you the definitive guide to multi-player games on the Internet...

Illustration © arcane by Dix

E LINE

There comes a point where it's almost impossible to find a partner for a game of *Magic*, let alone six people who have got the time to get together for a decent roleplaying session. It's a fact of life – we get busy upon occasion, and our gaming has to take second place. But if you are stuck for a game, you've got no excuse. If you have a computer you can engage in limitless hours of roleplaying, and we're not talking about the type of game where you only play against computer-controlled opponents. No, if you've got the know-how, you can play with dozens of like-minded gamers all over the world.

MUDs and MOOs have nothing to do with dirty cows – in fact they're on-line, real time, roleplaying games. Multi User Dungeons (MUDs) started way back in 1980, and have taken off with the increasing popularity of the Internet. MOO stands for Multi User Object Orientated environment – one of the many spin-offs from the original MUD games. But, what's it all about then?

If you played some of the early computer adventure games, you'll remember text screens where you typed in commands such as 'take book,' 'read book' and so on. MUDs are similar – they're text-based like the old adventure games, but they have real people playing in them, as well as computer-generated and controlled characters. You can talk to other people, fight them, go on quests with them and even have sex with them.

Communities build up, people fall in and out of love, fights break out... Just like real life, but in the Wild West, space, or even in a comic book setting. There are literally hundreds of MUDs and MOOs to choose from. And that's not including the MUD spin-offs and other on-line roleplaying games provided by services such as CompuServe. Some MUDs are traditional fantasy games, others are set in *Star Trek* universes, others still in the days of King Arthur and co. If you can't find at least one game you like, then the door is that way. Each MUD has its own purpose – some are level-based, where you have to work your way up through various levels, on others you're trying to work your way up the WHO list of players, which is a bit like the famous *Who's Who?* book, the highest rank on it being Wizard. Other games are based around scoring and some games use a combination of all three. If this isn't complicated enough, there are also different types of MUD. They roughly divided into the following:

"You can talk to people, fight them, go on quests with them, even have sex with them."

Tiny MUDs: These aren't, as their name might suggest, small. They tend to be more suited to social, rather than heavy, games playing. But don't let that put you off, they're a great place to start your MUD career. MUCKs and MUSHs are an extension of the Tiny MUDs.

LP MUDs: These tend to be more roleplaying-based. Most players seem to go round in groups, doing the usual adventure stuff. Killing a few monsters, rescuing a few people, putting heads together to solve a nasty puzzle – it's all in a day's work for your average roleplayer. The ultimate aim in LP MUDs is to become a Wizard. DikuMUDs are loosely linked to the LP MUD stable.

MOOs: Also based on the MUD system, the best description of MOOs is in the Internet Public Library Moo Introduction. "One of the benefits of the MOO is that interaction with other visitors and objects (desks, chairs, cat etc) creates a mood conducive to virtual community."

MUDs work by letting several players from anywhere in the world connect and play the game in real time. This can be a bit of a pain – if you arrange to meet up with

MUCKs and MUSHs are all based around the same system that MUDs use, but with unique bits included. Try the Internet search engine *Yahoo* to find your way to some.

The best times to play MUDs from a speed point of view are early mornings at the weekend, and very early, like 4am, during the week. Trouble is, not many other players are about at those times.

If you want to get a feel for MUDs and you have a CompuServe account, try one of the various on-line games on there. Though not exactly like MUDs, they do give you a feel for the game.

MUD information

There are various clients available, and many more on the way.

Some of the better-known ones are listed here. Starting with UNIX, which you'll find on most university computers:

TinyFugue is, surprisingly enough, only used for Tiny MUDs, though you can also use it with the LP ones. Available from:
`http://www.tcp.com/~hawkeye/tf`

If you're using a Winsock connection to the Internet, and most people will be, then you have a huge choice of clients. Some of the better ones are:
`Gmud: http://oeonline.com/~morton/gmud.html`

MUTT is a Windows client at:
`http://www.graphcomp.com/mutt/mutt.html`

MudWin, another Windows client, at:
`http://www.vmedia.com/alternate/archives/win/mudwin.html`

MUDSock, another Winsock client, at:
`http://www.tc.umn.edu/nlhome/m279/fayxx001/fun.html.`

If you want to use Telnet as your client, then you'll find the best one at:
`http://www.cwsapps.com/`

Some clients can only be used on specific MUDs, whereas others can be used on several different types – the Web page will tell you. Some of these clients are free and some are in beta versions, which means they could lock your computer up. Most are stable, though, and some are shareware. With these you can normally use the client for 30 days, if you want to use it after that you have to pay.

There are loads of good sites for MUDs on the World Wide Web. Try any of the following:

`At http://shsibm.shh.fi/mud/muds.html`
You'll find links to other pages here and all sorts of MUD-related information.

The so-called 'catalogue of catalogues' of MUD, MUSH and MOOs is at:
`http://educ.kent.edu/mu/catofcat.html`

On UseNet you'll find various groups. Some have a lot of traffic, others very little. You'll find lots of newcomers to MUDs, as well as experienced players, MUD-related chat and questions, and even the occasional bit of gossip. The best of them are:
`alt.mud, alt.mud.british, alt.mud.moo, alt.mud.cyberpunk, alt.mud.lp, alt.mud.tiny.`

`rec.games.mud.announce, rec.games.mud.diku, rec.games.mud.lp, rec.games.mud.misc, rec.games.mud.tiny.`

Most major on-line services have at least one area where you can chat about MUDs and the like, and some, such as CompuServe, have roleplaying games running that are similar to MUDs.

another player at a specific time, it's easy to get your time zones muddled up. You can connect and get involved at any time of the day or night, though evenings and the early hours tend to be the busiest, and often the most difficult times to get on.

Client relations

So now you know what they're all about, how do you get involved? You need several things: a computer, a modem, an Internet account, a good relationship with British Telecom and a piece of software called a 'client'. It doesn't make too much difference how fast your modem is, because unless you can type at lightening speed you won't see a great deal of difference. That said, I recommend a 14,400 baud modem.

Check that your Internet account will let you play MUDs. Some do not throw in Telnet facilities as standard, and because that's the main way to play MUDs you'll be stuck. Some Internet providers give away Telnet software with their packages, but keep an eye on the CDs covermounted with computer magazines, because Telnet software sometimes appears on them.

There are various other clients available. Telnet is okay, but in its most basic form it can get a bit irritating after a while. There's a list of other more MUD-orientated clients in the box on the left. The most important thing to remember, though, is to read the documents that come with them – otherwise you'll waste your money trying to get the thing working on-line.

Now with your software set up, you're almost ready for the off. The next thing to do is decide which MUD to start with. Most MUDs have a Web page you can visit where you can find out where the MUD is, what it's about and so on. The best place to start is at the Internet search engine, Yahoo. It has a huge list of MUDs and links, and can be found at: `http://www.yahoo.com`.

So, with your software ready, the address of your chosen MUD written down, you're ready to go. Many MUDs expect you to register – some let you do this via their Web page, but most expect you to register when you first connect to the MUD. It's all pretty standard stuff, about who you are and what you are going to be.

Create your character

Your next task is to create a character. Each MUD has its own way of going about this, so it's just a case of following the on-screen prompts. One important thing to remember is that you'll be asked to create a password for your character. There have been some embarrassing incidents in the MUD world concerning passwords, so make sure you don't use an obvious word such as your real name, your character's name, or something like 'MUD' or 'computer'.

You can change your password in the future if necessary. If you play more than one MUD, use a different password for each, and don't tell anyone what they are.

Now you've created a character, what next? More reading. As soon as you're logged on as your character, type: help. This will bring up a list of the commands you can use, other instructions you need, and a few other bits and pieces. Make sure you understand this lot, because it will save you bother and arguments later on, not to mention a huge phone bill.

News report

With that digested, type: news – this will bring up the game's latest information. Some MUDs produce newsletters which you can download from their Web sites. They'll be loads of useful hints and advice in this, so again read it carefully. This way you'll be up to date on all the comings and goings on your chosen MUD, and won't make an idiot of yourself.

Some MUDs have a room where you can practice the game's commands. The most common commands are ones used to talk to other players, such as: 'say'. Use 'look', surprisingly enough, to look at things, 'go' to, you guessed it... Most commands are self-explanatory, and the instructions will explain any strange ones. Commands with an @ in front of them are only available to Wizards or the God of the MUD – they allow them to change the MUD itself. If you're worried they may abuse these commands, don't be. Wizards tend to be veteran characters, and Gods set the whole thing up in the first place – they want you to stick around and play.

Before you enter this world of gaming, there are a few unwritten rules you should know about. These are culled from the brains of some experienced and seasoned MUD players. It was a messy process, but essential.

Treat others as you want to be treated yourself. If you are nasty, abusive or whatever, you run the risk of being labelled a 'no fun' person, or in an extreme case thrown off the MUD altogether. MUDs tend to be democratic about these things and allow users to vote. Arguments are one thing, being abusive is another.

If you ever feel like getting nasty, remember this little cautionary tale. A man

I'll call George took great delight in killing new players, abusing and attacking more experienced ones and so on. George struck up a friendship with another player, which resulted in them writing to one another via e-mail. The other player soon discovered what George was really like, and when George systematically killed one of his friend's new characters, the friend popped round to George's house and gave him a black eye. Funnily enough, George never did it again.

Take advice

If you're new to a game and want some help, find someone more experienced from the WHO list mentioned earlier, and ask them politely if they could give you a hand. Most of the time that person will reply in kind, many people genuinely want to help new players. However, following a player around, paging them constantly and generally being annoying obviously won't make you popular, and also puts you in the 'very annoying person' class. If you're really stuck and no-one seems to be able to help, you can post a question to one of the many UseNet groups. There you'll find loads of other players who'll be able to advise you.

Try to find out about any nasty characters on your MUD. Some, like George, take great delight in killing off the new players, or setting them off against other players. But remember: if you're involved in a player killer MUD, then it's only to be expected.

Learn some of the language which surrounds MUDs, so you can start to feel more at home. Dinos are people who've been on MUDs for a long time. If you get into a conversation with one of them, you should prepare for a talk along the lines of your grandparents reminiscing.

Bots are computer programs which are in MUDs, but which pretend to be real humans. *Julia* is the most famous – apparently some people thought she was real. Another term you need to familiarise yourself with is Net lag – this is the time between you typing your command and the remote computer responding. At peak times this can seem like years.

"These games are enormous fun... It's an exciting, ever-changing atmosphere."

Two sets of people you'll probably hear a lot about are Gods and Wizards. Gods are the wonderful people who set up and usually run MUDs, so treat them well. Wizards are one step down from Gods, but they have more commands at their disposal. They can be helpful, but it's best not to annoy them.

Remember that on a more combat-orientated MUD you're likely to be killed. Sounds obvious, but you'd be amazed how many people complain about this. Most MUDs have a quest on them. If you want to have a go at one, type: info quests – this will tell you where to find one.

Some MUDs include mobiles – nothing to do with phones, these are NPCs. You'll find good ones and bad ones lurking about. Remember, though, that if you kill a good mobile, nasty things can happen to you.

If the idea of MUD sex has intrigued you, then read on. There are some MUDs which are about nothing but sex, but if you find your character has found their significant other, then you could end up writing interactive erotica with a player thousands of miles away. MUD sex seems to break out like a rash on MUDs every now and again, but if you do get involved you're best off doing it in private, and show some respect for the person at the other end.

Addictive fun

MUDs have been around for a few years now, and the old text format is starting to show its age a bit. With CompuServe launching its successful WorldsAway 3D chat environment, and with the Virtual Reality Programming Language becoming increasingly popular, we could be on the verge of real time, 3D MUDs which can run on basic PCs over the phone.

These games are addictive and an enormous amount of fun to play. You can log on at any time and find plenty of other players, all ready, willing and armed. MUDs take no longer than any other gaming system to get the hang of. They grow and evolve with their players, so it's an exciting, ever-changing atmosphere. Just remember to smile sweetly at B.T.

where to start...

If you don't know where to start, here's a list of some MUDs and MOOs which you could try:

MUDs: ***Astaria*** **is a medieval fantasy, its home page is at:**
`http://pond.com/~mud/`

Endorian Empires **is a Tolkien-based game at:**
`http://www.usit.net/public/brick/eemud.html`

Genocide **is a player killer MUD at:**
`http://www.shsu.edu/~genlpc/`

Terris **is a British fantasy MUD which emphasises roleplaying and cooperation. It can be found on America OnLine.**

MOOs: ***IHABFAT MOO*** **is a *Star Wars*-type MOO at:**
`http://www.ica.net/pages/marc/ihabfat`

Necro MOO **is that rare beast, a British MOO, and is at:**
`http://netman.coa.edu/Moo.html`

Outlaw MOO **is a sort of 'Wild West meets the Future' type MOO at:**
`http://flake.org.8989`

LP MUDs: A good science fiction one is *Kalpha* at:
`http://yogi.mckendree.edu:3995/`

If you're more of a medieval fantasy person, try *New Moon* at:
`http://eclipse.cs.pdx.edu/`

If Tolkein is your scene, give *Two Towers* a go at:
`http://www.angband.com/towers`

MUDs are games like any other, but the social aspects of them are very much like real life. Keep that in mind while you play and you'll find it much more fun. People have met and married on MUDs, so you never know.

If you have a friend at university, try getting in their good books. University machines are more powerful than home computers, and loads of students worldwide use these machines to play MUDs, usually when they should be doing their work.

How To Be The

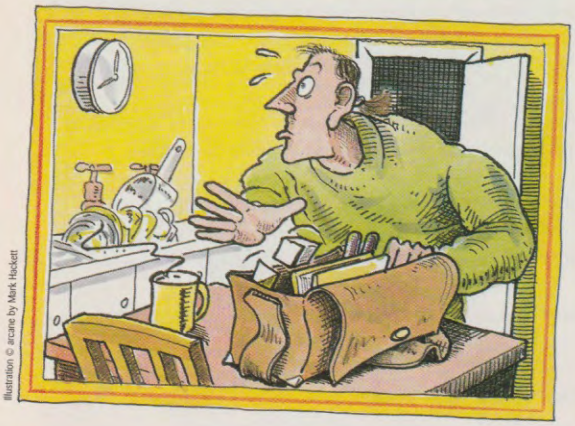


Illustration © arcane by Mark Hockett

Phil Clare *throws caution to the wind, abandon*

Once again, you've turned up at your mate's house to try to create a world of heroic adventure in the minds of your players. You've taken your cotton wool-padded figure cases out of the rucksack, removed several dice from each pocket, conjured 15 pencils out of nowhere and managed to get the file marked 'Top Secret' out of your other bag, without dropping the map face up in the middle of the table like you did last week. Only when you're ready for the off does it dawn on you – you've forgotten the rules. And it's raining. And you came here on your push-bike. Four miles.

"Not everyone can referee off the cuff and make the players think it's all written down in meticulous detail, but the less you plan, the more flexible you can be."

Perhaps it's time we started questioning the rules. I don't mean arguing about which system is the most realistic, or easy to use, or (God forbid!) fun – that's a completely different article. I mean, do we really need the rules at all? Or at least so many of them?

If you've never tried roleplaying without a system it's well worth a try, even if it's only for the pleasure of conjuring up the image of marketing men trying to figure out how to charge you 40 quid for two dice and a pencil. It certainly solves the problem of human battle computers who seem to be preprogrammed with the optimum character for every set of dice-rolls. A word of warning, however, for the referee who is used to having folders of tables for every eventuality, the inevitable consequence of throwing away your crutch is having to rely on the two feet of your own creativity. In the presence of players who demand a high degree of consistency and detail, it can be a nerve-racking experience.

A good step to take in order to acclimatise to the rarefied heights of rulelessness is to practice on the lower slopes, by experimenting with the rules you've already got. Let's face it, you don't use them all at the moment. For example, take the *AD&D* encumbrance rules. There are people who can calculate the effect on the movement rate of an ox-drawn wagon of the weight loss incurred by the party's 11 o'clock toilet stop (the result of a four-hour argument over the necessity of the inclusion of bowel movements for true roleplaying realism). Fortunately they are few and far between, but I digress. If the only way to escape the on-rushing horde is to lighten the load by, say, one heavily armoured fighter, then that's a different matter, but the tense, life and death situation should arise from the creativity of the referee and players, not the dictates of the rules.

Use your imagination

If you think the rules are too cumbersome, then ditch them and either replace them with an abbreviated version or just make it up as you go along. You do have to be reasonable, and you can only start doing this with the co-operation of the players. If they think you're on an ego trip and that you're only doing it to stop them arguing, then you aren't going to get very far. On the other hand, anything that aids an exciting, flowing storyline will no doubt be applauded by all but the most pedantic of participants.

A good area in which the play can be made less cumbersome is the ubiquitous ability check. Some systems have had these from the beginning, and

Freeform games, which often take place at conventions, rarely use any rules at all. If you're interested in finding out more about freeform gaming, check out **arcane** 10, for within that issue Andrew Rilstone gave us the complete low-down. Turn to page 57 if you missed it.

O BREAK RULES

the rulebook in favour of his fertile imagination.

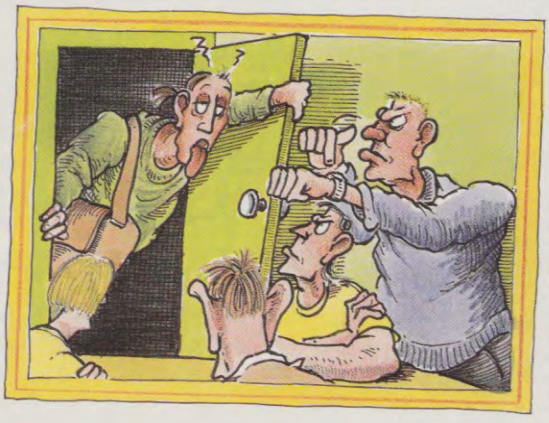
some have introduced them to counteract criticisms of their lack of flexibility, but it does seem a rather strange way of doing it. If a player wants to leap from his tree branch to drag the mutant boojum from its motorcycle, just give him a 25% chance of success (or perhaps 2.5% if the boojum happens to be 40 stone of muscle wearing duralloy armour decorated with poisoned razor wire). Decide how well he succeeded or how badly he failed from his proximity to your benchmark. You could consult the rules, look up a few tables and compare it with half a dozen ability scores, but I doubt you would be that far out, and besides, its much more fun to spend the time going into gory details about the consequences.

Encourage the players

You don't have to initiate everything. If the magic system doesn't quite suit the society of the world you've created, why not have a word with the players who want to be wizards? What's special about your culture? If one of your players has ideas to develop a character beyond the normal constraints of the rules, do all you can to encourage him (unless he simply wants the equivalent of a Kill-O-Zap No-Save Autodestruct gun/wand/spaceship/prosthesis, of course).

As you become less dependent on the tables and rules, you may be surprised at how much more momentum the game can develop. Once you and your players are comfortable with the idea that those big fat books which cost so much money weren't dictated to Gary Gygax on top of a mountain by the God of roleplaying, then it's time to ditch them altogether.

The first task is to generate the characters. Whatever the system, players feel restricted by the rolls of a dice. It's never quite enough, is it? So do without! You, the referee, set the limits. Take the desires of the players into account, but don't prejudice the campaign you have in mind. A description of the campaign milieu is advisable in most cases to give the players' fertile imaginations some background. Discuss ideas with the players and ask them for a short description of their characters – background, personality, equipment and so on. You need surprisingly little detail – the rest will grow as you go along. A sheet of A4 paper per character will usually be enough. The amount of preparation involved is up to you. Not everyone can referee off the cuff and make the players think it's all written down in meticulous detail, but the less you plan, the more flexible you can be.



All you really need is a good idea of the world and two dice. If you want help with the world, then a few back issues of **arcane** will provide some excellent pointers for this – see page 60 for details. So what about the dice? It could be more than two, but 2d6 or 2d10 will suffice for pretty much everything. Every time you're not sure what's about to happen, pick a probability, roll the dice and see how close you get. Did you fail? Badly? So did the character! If the players prefer, you could tell them your probabilities before you roll, especially if you all feel nostalgic for a good row over realism, but sometimes it's best to keep shtum. After all, how often do the fates explain themselves to you?

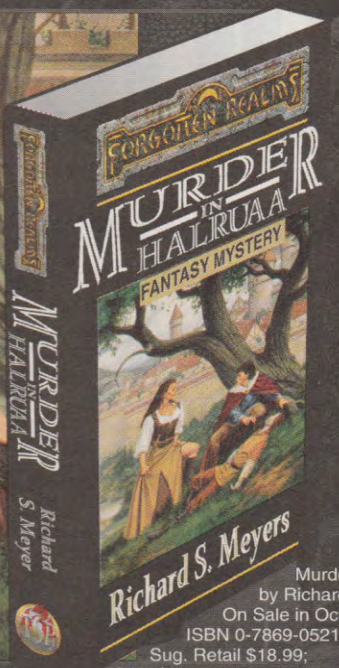
> "All you need is a good idea of the world and two dice."

At this point I have to admit my indebtedness to one particular referee who set no limits on characters and dropped a Viking, a space pilot, a Roman soldier, a Victorian inventor and a mad scientist's daughter through a time warp into one of the most interesting and compelling campaigns I have ever played. There really should be no limits on what your imagination can do. There's a lot to be said for living life by the rules – but then again, you know what they say about rules...

Of course, the main benefit of ditching your rules system is the fact that you don't have to carry the rulebooks around with you. As a long-standing *AD&D* referee, I can certainly see how that would be handy...

The half-way house, in between using all your rules and using none at all, is the adoption of a rules-light system. The new game from TSR, *Dragonlance Fifth Age* is a good example. See our review on page 66.

A HERO IS MURDERED!



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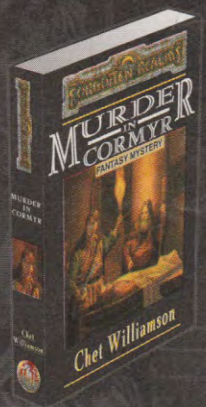

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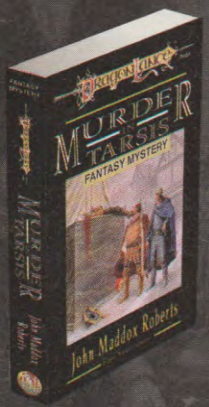

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New Fantasy Settings part 2: AGES OF IRON

This month Phil Masters investigates ancient Greek, Persian, Chinese and Roman societies as potential inspiration for new fantasy campaigns.

Surprisingly few RPGs have settings clearly based on Greece or Rome, although there are a number of historical supplements around. This may be because the pseudo-medieval games are forever using fragments from classical myth.

As we explained last month, the association between the Middle Ages and fantasy is an accident, and shouldn't limit roleplaying gamers, especially because many myths and legends come from an earlier era – that of Greece, Rome, and the heroic days of China and Persia. This month, we look at these periods as potential bases for fantasy gameworlds.

These settings have Iron Age technology which is not too different from that of standard pseudo-medieval games, but they are a little less advanced – plate armour is unknown, and fortifications are likely to be wooden palisades atop earth banks. On the other hand, these societies may seem more familiar to modern gamers than realistic medievalism would – cities and disciplined armies are more 'modern' than rural feudalism.

The Greek model

Greek civilisation can mean several different things. First, there is the Homeric era, the age of the Iliad and the Odyssey – a Bronze Age world of feuding petty kings and chariot warfare. Second is the Classical era of rival city-states, alternately fighting each other and facing off against the threat of Persia, the foundation of Western civilisation. This culminates in the meteoric career of Alexander the Great, followed by the Hellenistic era, when Alexander's empire fragmented and his successors fought over the remains.

A Homeric game should be dramatic, high-powered and mythic. The characters should be larger than life, possibly with divine parents, which is a good excuse for superhuman PCs. The gods are forever interfering in mortal affairs, setting quests and throwing curses.

A Classical-style game can be a lot more realistic. Campaign themes might concern politics and social interaction, but it needn't be all subtle scheming – political differences can lead to wars, and Greece also faced the threat of foreign conquest. Hellenistic-style games offer even more opportunities for warriors, but also for diplomats and missionaries. They could be set in a cultural ferment, thrown into confusion by the recent empire-builder – unstable in the long term, but interesting.

Technology: Greek-style tech can run from Homeric Bronze Age to Iron Age. The primary power source (in the absence of magic) is muscle power, whether human or animal. One archetypal Greek element that could be a lot of fun is seafaring; the Greeks used both sail and oars – warships found the latter more reliable in combat and fought by ramming, whereas sails were cheaper for merchants. Like most ancient cultures, the Greeks kept (foreign) slaves to perform menial tasks. These were relatively well treated, except in places such as the mines. (Ships were rowed by free, skilled professionals.)

With horse breeds still fairly small, and harnesses quite primitive, Greek armies after the decline of the Homeric charioteer aristocracy mostly relied on citizen infantry – 'hoplites' in bronze armour, fighting in close formation. The Macedonians modified this to produce the pike-armed phalanx, which could roll over almost anything on the battlefield, but worked best with cavalry and light infantry support – thus, Hellenistic warriors were specialists, using a variety of fighting styles. Fighter PCs could be trained citizens or foreign mercenaries.

Lastly, note that the Greeks were interested in mathematics and science. Their architecture employed some of their discoveries, which is why it tends to look so much more elegant than earlier building.

Social Organisation: Homer told of heroic petty kings who kept small groups of upper-class supporters in pocket-sized cities and rural mansions, but later systems were more complex. Cities ruled over farming areas, and evolved systems for sharing power out among the property-owning citizenry. The city-states threw up all sorts of political systems, from Athens' democracy to Sparta's military totalitarianism. However, there was also plenty of scope for kings and 'tyrants' – strong individuals with varying claims to power.

See last month's article for more on Bronze Age cultures, and on chariots in games – turn to page 60 if you missed it.

Hellenistic societies were a confused jumble of influences from Greece, Persia, India and elsewhere, mostly run as monarchies. Their rulers often permitted individual cities and provinces to keep whatever systems they preferred, provided they paid their taxes.

The Supernatural: The Greeks started out with a typical early polytheism, with quarrelsome deities and personalised natural forces. As their superb literature developed, these legends were enriched.

However, the Greeks also invented philosophy, thinking hard about the world without crediting everything to the gods. Thus, to get the feel of such a setting right, supernatural effects may have to be limited. The gods, being superhuman, can do what they like, and their offspring may be very powerful, but a mortal must understand the nature of the universe in order to control it.

Magicians will mostly be priests and priestesses of minor deities using specific powers, such as prophecy, granted by a divine patron. However, there are other powerful non-priestly spell-casters in the myths – these tend to be strange, foreign and often female, and even they only display a limited range of spells. Mostly, Greek-style games should involve warriors, priests and thinkers, not spell-slingers.

King of Kings

What about the Enemy Empire that the Greeks faced, fought off and conquered? In RPGs, Ancient Persia is perhaps the least exploited major historical empire of all, less often mentioned than China or Japan, despite lying much closer to Europe. This is probably because Ancient Persia fell long ago, whereas China and Japan had fairly continuous histories down to this century. However, until the fall of the Shah in the 1970s, Persia (Iran) was often referred to as the oldest empire in the world. This was true in a way because there was a fairly continuous tradition linking the ancient power with the Shah. On the other hand, Persia had changed a lot. It started out as another power in the Tigris-Euphrates region, like Babylon and Assyria. But it expanded far beyond that, and created a strong, well-run state under its 'King of Kings.' A setting based on early (Achaemenid) Persian culture would be melodramatic, grandiose and colourful, with opportunities for politics, tourism and combat.

Technology: Muscle power was central to Iron Age Persia. If the architecture was not as elegant as in Greece, it was certainly dramatic – the palaces were built around pillared halls, where a lord could sit in state. Because the Empire ruled the parched lands of the Middle East, it also had to use large-scale irrigation systems.

In warfare, the Empire deployed a rich nobility who, in this era, abandoned chariots for cavalry. They were supported by a huge variety of not very enthusiastic levies from the provinces, mostly fighting on foot. Warrior characters could be nobles or mercenaries – in historical Persia, the latter could include Greek hoplites.

Social Organisation: Persia was the first stable multi-national empire. The subjects of the King of Kings spoke many languages and worshipped many gods – they were treated equally, but heavily taxed.

The problem of ruling such a large area with primitive and unreliable communications was solved by a system of 'satraps', provincial governors. Each satrap was nearly a king in his own province. To keep them in their place, their chief secretaries and treasurers, and the commanders of the main military garrisons, were appointed by the King. Furthermore, inspectors, the 'King's Eyes', travelled around the provinces looking out for trouble. In a gameworld with such an empire, PCs could either become part of the provincial government system and even satraps themselves, with the permanent worry of more powerful supervisors, or they could become King's Eyes, working to ferret out the schemes of the devious satraps.

You don't need elves!

One of the worst consequences of the success of *Dungeons & Dragons* concerns non-human races in fantasy games. Not that there's anything wrong with the *D&D* races – although they are blatantly ripped off from Tolkien – but they've become clichés. Every gameworld seems to have tall and noble elves, grumpy, technophile dwarves, nasty orcs and short, foodie hob... ah, halflings. Even the cyberpunk world of *Shadowrun* has them, as does *AD&D's Dark Sun* setting, although it changes their natures so much that using the same names seems more confusing than convenient.

But given a fantasy world based on non-medieval history, there is good reason not to include these clichés. However, unfortunately for those who demand non-human PCs, other mythologies are sometimes short of character-suitable races. (This is less surprising when you look at the original dwarves and elves of folklore; they are a lot less human and comprehensible than the Tolkien/*D&D* versions.) Mostly, what you get are malicious monsters, enigmatic spirits and servants of the gods.

There are a number of solutions. You can search yet more mythologies for suitable races – Greek myth has Centaurs and Satyrs, and *Lace and Steel* used these in a Renaissance-style world (see next issue) to good effect. Or you can raid SF and anthropology – instead of dwarves and sea-elves, why not have mountains full of Neanderthals and oceans with intelligent dolphins? The Romans could probably have convinced themselves that many 'barbarians' were barely human, and they liked to depict dolphins in their art. Or, if you're creative enough, you can make your own races, as seen in *Tekumel* or *Gargentihr* (see next month's issue).

A complicating factor in the game should be the variety of local cultures. The Achaemenids ruled everything from mountain tribes and nomad horsemen to Greek colony-cities, and allowed most of them some autonomy – the Greeks even had a certain amount of local democracy. This system fits with the RPG tradition of varied cultures in a small area – the Empire can stop them fighting each other.

The Supernatural: Although the Persians permitted their subjects to worship as they liked, they had a mythology of their own. Their main religion was Zoroastrianism, as founded by Zarathustra (Zoroaster). This declared that there was just one true god, Ahura Mazda (later known as Ormazd), along with a single supreme power of evil, Angra Mainyu (Ahriman). Some gods from older mythologies were demoted to demons. Zoroastrianism started out as a cult of kingly power, tied in with old fire cults, but later the war between good and evil became the key feature. The universe was a battleground – Ormazd would eventually win, but meanwhile humans had to avoid sin and impurity. Dead bodies were impure, while fire, earth and water were all sacred; therefore, bodies could not be burnt or buried on land or at sea without sacrilege. Instead, they were exposed on high places, to be devoured by vultures.

With most supernatural creatures being servants of light or darkness, magic is chancy stuff. Most heroes in such a setting should be mighty warriors, perhaps with supernatural allies. However, some Persian heroes did know some sorcery – mostly prophetic effects which would warn them of the wiles of demons and perhaps ways to bind those monsters. They might also face evil sorcerers, and have to struggle through magical darkness to cut them down.

Chinese minds

Many fantasy worlds have a token Mysterious Power off to the east, so why not use such a setting as the core of the campaign, rather than a mere add-on? Start with a large central empire, run by a bureaucracy which – in theory, anyway – recruits on merit. The system may suffer from corruption and inefficiency, and the empire may find itself under threat from barbarians, who occasionally take over. Fortunately, the system is robust enough to adapt to any rulers. Meanwhile, countless peasants carry on growing their crops and keeping their heads down.

Opportunities for adventurers include fighting in civil wars, exposing barbarian plots, Robin Hood-style banditry, urban adventures (including detective stories), or secret wars between conspiratorial factions. Warrior PCs may be acrobatic martial artists rather than walking tanks; their magician counterparts can be bizarre, burning tortoise shells and animating their own eyebrows in combat.

Technology: China is famous for having created many noteworthy inventions, from clockwork through printing to gunpowder, long before the West. In fact, this achievement has been somewhat exaggerated, but a quasi-Chinese gameworld should include a fair amount of simple but ingenious gadgetry. The Iron Age technology should incorporate elegant craftsmanship – warriors use crossbows, while scholars study both earthquakes and the stars with bronze instruments. If you include gunpowder (the Chinese developed it around the tenth century), it is likely to be used in rockets.

Social Organisation: The keys to a Chinese-style setting are formality, tradition and bureaucracy. Characters have to deal with a system that has rules for everything, or so its officials like to think.

Chinese culture had a vast regard for a handful of ancient philosophers, notably Confucius, who preached ideals of duty, obedience and justice. This contrasts with the mystical Taoism, which emphasised the quest for personal enlightenment. Some Taoists could achieve this through magic, alchemy or skill in fighting for justice, so the philosophy could be important in a game. There was also the early philosophy of Legalism, which said that everyone should know their place, and that laws should be precise and ferociously enforced – a Legalist empire or faction could be a worrying enemy for free and easy adventurers.

The Supernatural: Chinese myth provides an interesting view of gods and supernatural powers, which had an intricate bureaucracy of their own. When dealing with spirits, you need to be aware of their precise place in the scheme of things – it may be no good asking an earth-god for rain, say, because even if he wants to help he has to send you off to work through the proper channels. This bureaucracy also explains how famous historical figures could become divine – it allowed for promotions and demotions, and mortals could be granted membership. (This could be an interesting new career for powerful PCs!)

Chinese dragons are more courteous and spiritual than the western type, but very powerful. Many of them are gods, responsible for rain, rivers and seas. All have great supernatural powers, and should usually be spoken to respectfully, even by the greatest hero.

China also had its fair share of wizards, many of them expert in Chinese alchemy, which was largely concerned with immortality potions. (Going by their real-world recipes, a lot of these were actually highly poisonous. Gameworld versions may be different.) Other stories – and modern oriental fantasy movies – involve powerful magicians with all sorts of exotic powers, although most of them still pay lip service to Taoist philosophy.

Lastly, the Chinese also believed in dangerous (non-bureaucratic) supernatural monsters. For example, fans of Hong Kong cinema may keep combat-loving players amused with the Hopping Vampires…

chinoiserie

For some idea of the options possible in a Chinese-style campaign, take a look at:

- **Any historical kung fu movie.**
- **TV's *The Water Margin* – Robert van Gulik's *Judge Dee* detective stories.**
- **Barry Hughart's *Master Li* novels, which borrow ideas from all over Chinese history and myth. Mix them all together, and stir like crazy.**
- **Terry Pratchett's *Interesting Times*.**

There are many novels available set in (fairly) historical Greece or Rome, including Mary Renault's works, Gene Wolfe's fantastical *Soldier of the Mist* and *Soldier of Arete*, Tom Holt's *Goatsong* and *The Walled Orchard*, Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God*, Lindsey Davis' *Falco* stories (an ancient Roman detective) and the *Asterix* comic-strip.

The Roman Empire

Ancient Rome was the greatest empire in European history, and is in many ways the 'classic' ancient empire, with a huge capital, powerful provincial governors, multiple subject-races and lots of spear-armed legionaries. A game that includes such a power has plenty of scope for adventure in conquered lands, but also the option of exploration, reconnaissance and espionage beyond the frontier.

A Pseudo-Roman empire can be run as either benevolent or sinister – a bunch of brutal conquerors, or a power with a mission to bring peace and law to everyone. Of course, a moderately complex game can permit both opinions, depending on characters' viewpoints. Perhaps a band of heroes should realise that they can't entirely destroy the Empire; if they did, the world would fall apart in chaos and feuding, but reform is possible – a return to the old system, say, the long-lost Republic...

Alternatively, the PCs can be based just beyond the Empire's borders, and spend their time protecting their independent homeland from imperial schemes, demonstrating that conquest would be too expensive to be worthwhile, rooting out spies and so on. Of course, if a greater threat appears – a Dark Lord, say – they might have to engage in a diplomatic mission to convince the Empire to direct its legions where they are most needed.

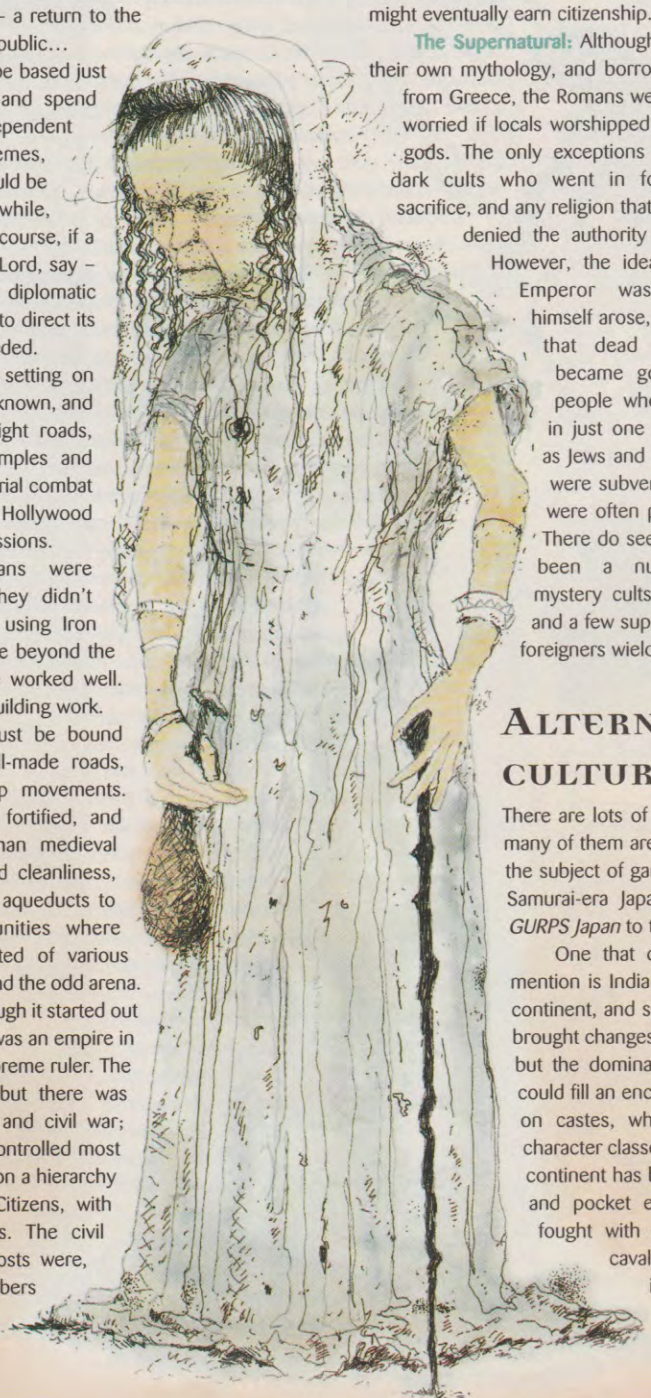
One bonus with basing a setting on Rome is that the clichés are well known, and research is easy. Legions, straight roads, galleys powered by slaves, temples and villas, chariot racing and gladiatorial combat – working through the full set of Hollywood images should fill a good few sessions.

Technology: The Romans were efficient and hard-working. They didn't create much new technology, using Iron Age devices and weapons a little beyond the Greeks, but what they did use worked well. They were good at large-scale building work.

A Roman-style empire must be bound together by a network of well-made roads, assisting both trade and troop movements. Cities tend to be walled and fortified, and cleaner and more pleasant than medieval towns. The Romans appreciated cleanliness, and therefore built magnificent aqueducts to bring water to their communities where necessary. Buildings, constructed of various materials, can include temples and the odd arena.

Social Organisation: Although it started out as a democracy of sorts, Rome was an empire in its age of glory, with a single supreme ruler. The throne was usually inherited, but there was plenty of scope for scheming and civil war; power often went to whoever controlled most of the army. Society was based on a hierarchy of classes. At the top were Citizens, with extensive rights and privileges. The civil service and army command posts were, for the most part, filled by members of high-ranking Citizen families, working their way up a career ladder. Then there were the people of conquered provinces, who had less power but who might earn citizenship in various ways, and who had clear legal rights. People from beyond the frontier were all 'barbarians', although a sensible Roman would realise that some of them were cultured folk. Lastly, there were slaves – some of them prisoners of war forced into manual labour, some well-educated 'indoor servants' from advanced nations such as Greece, who could make themselves invaluable in even the Emperor's own household, and who might eventually earn citizenship.

The Supernatural: Although they had their own mythology, and borrowed more from Greece, the Romans were not too worried if locals worshipped their own gods. The only exceptions would be dark cults who went in for human sacrifice, and any religion that somehow denied the authority of Rome. However, the idea that the Emperor was a god himself arose, or at least that dead emperors became gods; thus, people who believed in just one god, such as Jews and Christians, were subversives, and were often persecuted. There do seem to have been a number of mystery cults in Rome, and a few supposed wizards and witches – mostly foreigners wielding their peculiar ancient lore.



Rules to use

As with last month's periods, finding rules suited to games set in these settings is a matter of judgement and taste. *AD&D* may be suitable, if you can lose plate armour and multiple-choice pole-arms – its melodramatic heroism is appropriate for Homeric Greece, where heroes carved through hordes of lesser beings on the battlefield. TSR's *Dark Sun* setting has 'classical' elements, such as city-states and gladiators. You could also take a look at the *Historical Reference* supplements, which include two on Greece and one on Rome.

***GURPS*, too, has plenty of useful source material (*GURPS China, GURPS Greece, GURPS Imperial Rome...*), and the system is designed to be highly flexible, while *Hero System* or *Rolemaster* fans may recall ICE's *Mythic Greece*. Or there is *Runequest*, designed for use in the world of Glorantha, which mixes a lot of 'classical' and earlier elements together.**

Or, if you want to run a highly cinematic Chinese-based campaign, take a look at *Feng Shui*, and especially the material concerning monsters, sorcerers, and swordsmen in 69AD China.

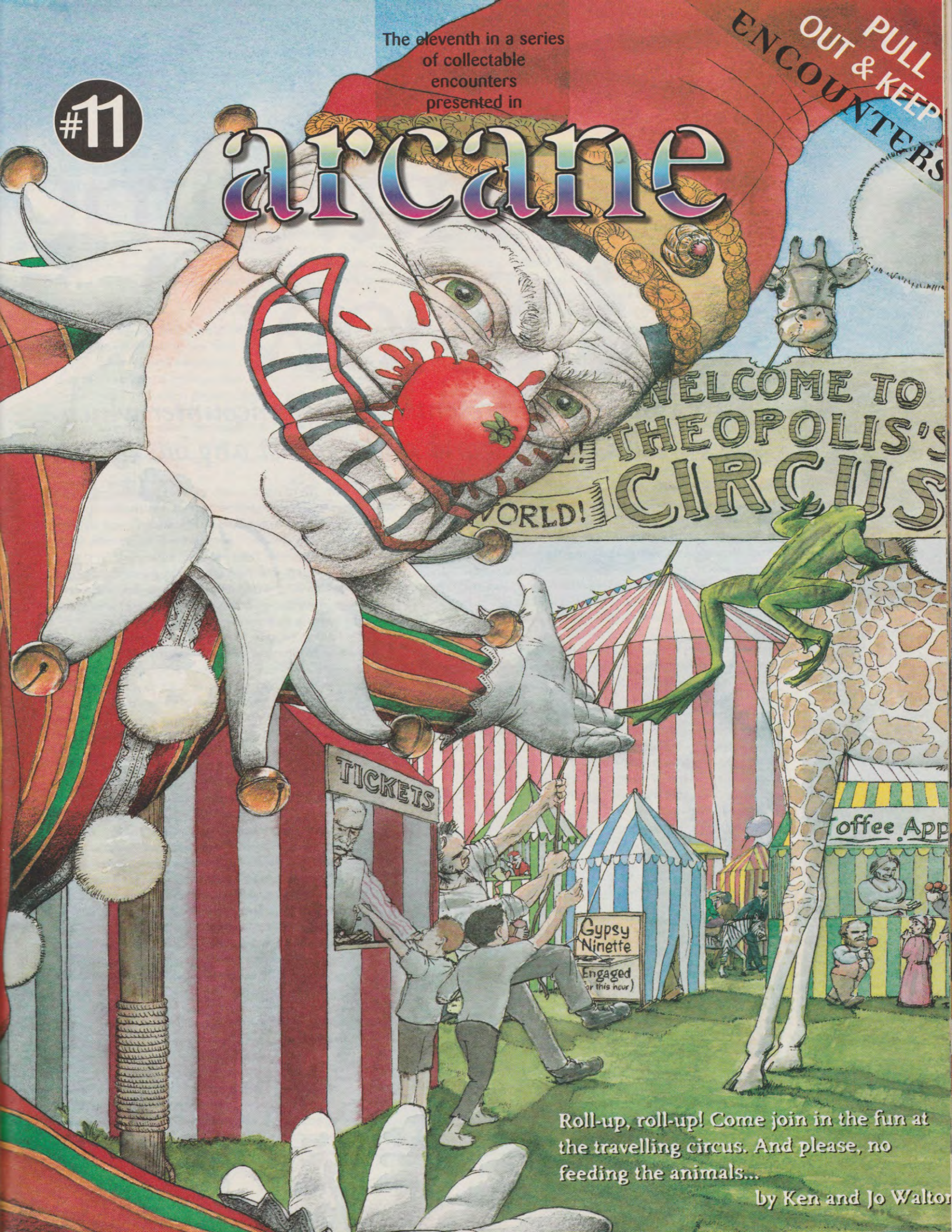
Alternative cultures

There are lots of other interesting early cultures, but many of them are already well known to gamers, and the subject of games and supplements. For example, Samurai-era Japan is covered by everything from *GURPS Japan* to the upcoming *Sengoku*.

One that deserves more than an occasional mention is India. Civilisation arose early in this sub-continent, and subsequently waves of invaders each brought changes. Indian history is long and complex, but the dominant features are a mythology which could fill an encyclopedia and a social system based on castes, which could justify traditional game character classes. Through most of history, the sub-continent has been divided up into petty kingdoms and pocket empires. The wars between these, fought with elephants and rockets as well as cavalry and infantry, and the occasional invading foreigners, suggest plenty of ideas for action-filled games.

Putting two different cultures next to each other can have interesting results – look at the history of Greece and Persia...

Of course, most settings can be played for comedy as well as heroism... "What have the Romans ever done for us?"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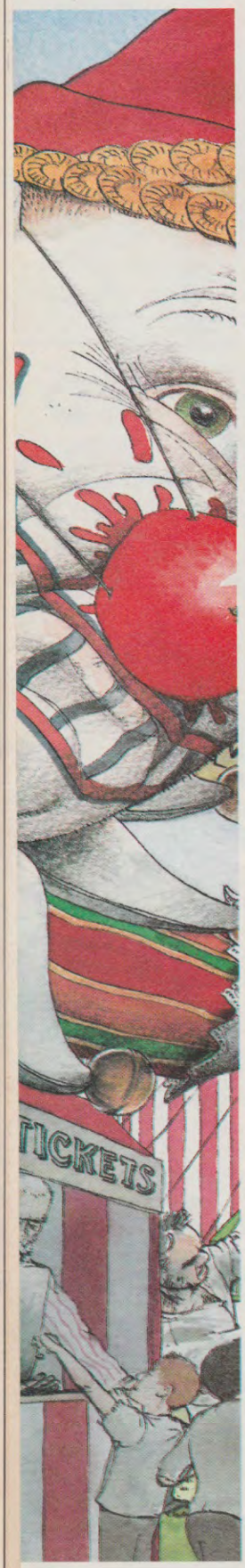


The Travelling Show

arcane *proudly presents another encounter which you can use in any world and against any background.*

The tents have sprung up overnight in the empty field like brightly coloured mushrooms. The tinny yet somehow exciting music is playing. The air is full of the scent of candyfloss, toffee apples and fun. The circus has come to town. See the freak show – roll up, roll up, don't miss the bearded lady, the octopus woman and the Thing from Beyond. On every side people are urging you to some new experience – have a ride on the camel, win a prize on the hoopla – and the grand entertainment shows every night in the big top. The clowns are laughing and walking around on stilts, there's a mysterious gypsy woman with a crystal ball outside the fortune teller's tent, children are chattering, the high wire is strung, the horses are ready with pretty girls on their backs – why are you hesitating? Surely there's nothing wrong?

You can have all the fun of the fair at the travelling show, all the glitter and excitement possibly concealing something sinister beneath. This encounter may be used in any world and against any background. The travelling show moves around, it can visit any location. A party can visit it when it comes to town and investigate a problem. Or it can fit easily into an on-going campaign in which the party encounters someone or something among the tents, booths and wide-eyed children. Alternatively they can run away, join the circus and base an adventure around travelling with the circus people and performing with them for a while.

Travelling shows can be found in any place and any era without much need for change. They are good places to find unusual people with different skills. They are also good places for unusual PCs to find employment and become acceptable. Dwarves, elves and other demi-humans who find themselves in a world where they do not fit can feel at home at the freak show. In fact, the circus is a very good place for anyone who is unusual in any way, because here they can be treated as human.

The travellers live in gaily-painted caravans, and ply their trade from brightly coloured booths and stands. From the travellers' point of view, the purpose of the whole show is to separate the 'marks' from their money, as painlessly as possible. And to the travellers, everyone is either show-folk or a 'mark' to be taken advantage of. From the marks' point of view, they are there to buy a little wonder and a little glitter, even if it is slightly tawdry and going to rub off soon. Children love the show, because for them the glitter is real.

The System

You'll notice that, even though we present character descriptions for all the people in the travelling show, we don't provide you with any stats. That's a deliberate decision – you're supposed to be able to use this encounter with all manner of roleplaying games, there's no way we could provide stats for all of them. That shouldn't be a problem for you – just make up the stats for these characters yourself, using the descriptions as a starting point. Same goes for other 'system' details – make them up to fit your campaign.

The Show

The Crowd

The show ground is almost always thronged with people. Many of these will be children, ranging from wide-eyed toddlers up to cynical adolescents who are almost old enough not to want to run away and join the circus. At every town a few of these find temporary jobs helping with the booths and shows, but very few will be taken along when the circus packs up and leaves. There are also young couples hand in hand, groups of older children and young people, parents and a scattering of other people of all ages. The crowd is bemused by the show people – clowns in costume walking on stilts, horse dancers in sequinned costumes, jugglers keeping vast arrays of unusual objects in the air, unusually tall or short people, the strong man, the magician, the gypsy, the fire-eater and so on. It isn't possible to go far through the ground without seeing someone exotic. Children may point at the strange people, but anyone with the slightest pretension to sophistication will at least pretend to take it in their stride.

Booths

The booths all have some contest of skill, suitable for anyone to try. They include a coconut shy, throwing darts into cards, negotiating a narrow plank over a tub of water while blindfolded, guessing the number of beads in a jar, shoving halfpennies and so on. They are often rigged. They are also

designed to make the mark feel as if he might well win if only he had another try. Prizes tend to look spectacular and desirable, but generally turn out to be cheaply made and ephemeral. In some medieval settings the show will combine with a fair where useful goods are sold, people are hired and services can be purchased. At a pure show very little will be on sale apart from food (candyfloss, hot dogs, ice-cream etc) and exotic lucky items – bunches of heather, ammonites, carved pixies and so on.

Sideshows

The sideshows are tents, mostly with barkers outside inducing passing marks to roll up, pay their money and enjoy the delights within. These delights can consist of almost anything. There may be a bearded lady, a tattooed lady, a lady dancing with a snake, sword swallowers, jugglers, fire-eaters, cockfights, a hall of mirrors, an octopus-woman, a horror from outer space or almost anything else. The barker's patter will almost certainly make whatever is inside the tent sound much more enticing and attractive than it actually is.

The Big Top

The travelling show's main attraction is the big top, where there are two shows nightly with animals, clowns, trapeze artists, horse dancers and the like.

Rides

The show is not a fairground, but it has a few rides, some suitable for children and some suitable for adults.

Magic

The magic of the circus folk may be real or illusory, depending on the particular campaign world – in the adventure on page 50 it is a combination of the two. In a world where magic is common, there will be lots of magical performers in the big top and in the sideshows, although much of it will be illusionary.

Technology

In most medieval/fantasy campaign worlds the travellers have a slightly better understanding of technology than the peasants they move among. In Europe in the Middle Ages tinkers mended pots and pans, sharpened knives and did other necessary maintenance and repair work for which a neighbourhood could not support a permanent artisan. In modern and future circuses wagons are pulled by engines rather than animals, and rides are powered by electricity. Circus technology will seem to be a strange mixture of the old-fashioned and the futuristic – holograms mixed with clockwork, fortune-telling mixed with computer games. In a future or space game, the circus could travel in its own battered spaceship.

Billing

Within the show, status is measured by billing – whether or not one is mentioned on the posters that are put up about the circus in the towns the show visits. Only those who perform in the big top have any billing at all, and among them the size and ranking of their names on the poster is of utmost importance. Newcomers who are spectacular, and whose names are immediately put on the bills in prominent positions, will undoubtedly put noses out of joint.

Animals

The circus has elephants, snakes, performing dogs and a pair of elderly lions, Marmaduke and Mamie. Marmaduke has recently been fitted with steel false teeth. This is unfortunate, because he likes chasing cars and biting through tires. In the daytime the animals are on display in cages where they can be seen for a fee. In the evenings they perform in the big top.

People

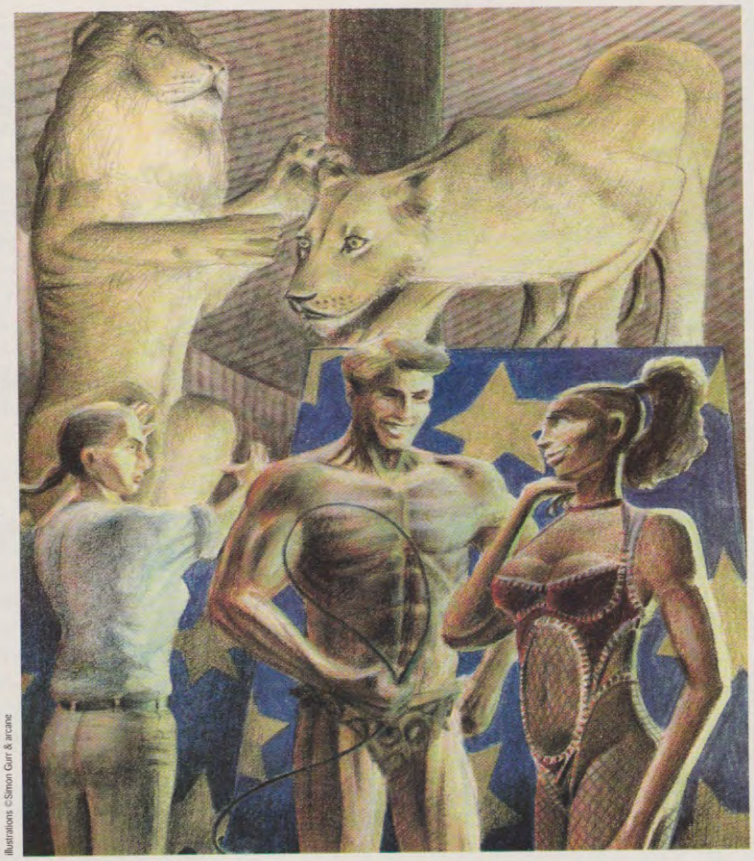
Mr. Theopolis

Mr. Theopolis is the Ringmaster. He has a curly moustache, a red coat and a loud voice. He owns the show, and has the ultimate power in hiring and firing, and in scheduling events for the big top. He used to be a strong man, and at 48 is still very burly. Mr. Theopolis is actually rather mild-mannered and tends to let his wife bully him and make the real decisions.

Theopolis' quotes:

"Ladies and Gentlemen! Allow me to present! The Amazing! The Incredible! The Wonderful! The Marvellous! The Terrific! The Astonishing! The Breathtaking!..."

"I'll have to check with Ninette."



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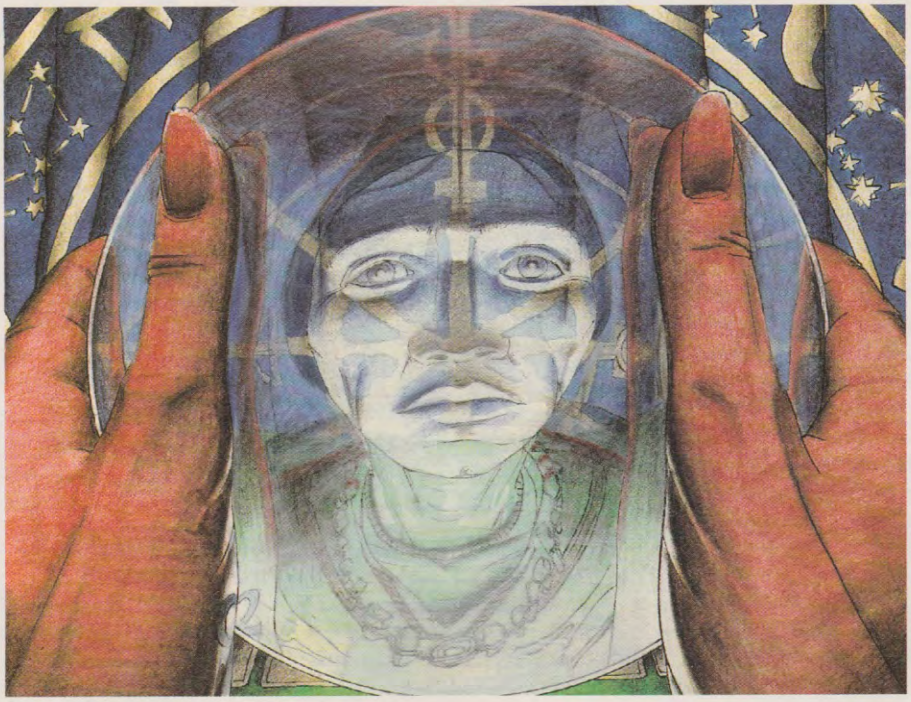

Madame Ninette

Lee Ninette is actually Mrs. Theopolis. She was originally a horse dancer, but she was unfortunately crippled in a terrible accident when someone fell from a trapeze, knocking her from a horse which then trampled her. She is paralysed from the waist down and uses a wheelchair. She has long dark hair and wears typical gypsy clothes. Lee Ninette has no actual ability to foretell the future at all, but she can tell a lot about people from their clothes and appearance, and is very good at faking palm reading, card reading and crystal gazing. Many people who have their fortunes read are convinced that she is genuine. She is not popular among the circus folk because she has a dictatorial manner and sometimes takes against people for no apparent reason, or because she is jealous and suspects that Mr Theopolis finds them more attractive than her. She is 40, but looks much older.

Ninette's quotes:
"I can see a tall, dark, handsome stranger..."
"When I say no, I mean no!"

Sintra

Sintra is a horse dancer, one of the girls who rides bareback on a pony doing spectacular stunts while dressed in a costume consisting largely of sequins. She is pretty and very good at riding, but not too bright.

Sintra's quotes:
"Come and see my latest riding stunt."
"How do I look – do sequins suit me?"

Clancy

Clancy is 12, lives in the town, but has found a job working at the circus running errands. Clancy does anything from delivering hot dogs to picking up trash, and wants to stay with the show so badly that it hurts, which is painfully obvious to everyone. It's also clear to the travellers that, though they like Clancy well enough, there's plenty more kids just the same in the next town down the road, and enthusiasm will not do instead of talent. Clancy has short hair, a baseball cap, a drop-dead attitude, thinks the show is wonderful and mundane life is terrible, and truly believes that it is possible to know it all. Clancy knows all the circus people and will keep their secrets as far as possible, unless made to believe that there is a compelling and essential reason for talking to someone else. Oh, and is Clancy a boy or a girl? "What's that to you, mister?"

Clancy's quote:
"Circus? Us travellers don't call it a circus, we call it a show."

Cymberine

Cymberine is a fat jolly-looking clown. He wears red clothes with white pom-poms all over, and paints his face in a huge grin. He can juggle extremely well, which translates into an ability to throw and hit almost anything. He is bad tempered and grumpy when he's not performing.

Cymberine's quotes:
"Have you been a good little boy?"
"Get lost and leave me alone!"

Nancy

The Human Octopus, Nancy may be a natural freak, an alien, or someone from another dimension. She looks like an armless mermaid would if the mermaid had tentacles instead of a tail. Nancy's tentacles have suckers and are excellent for manipulating things. Nancy makes an excellent sideshow attraction. She can usually be found reading a book on modern literary theory, and has a PhD in Deconstruction obtained by a correspondence course from Harvard. She spends very little time socialising with the other travellers, but likes the way they accept her oddities. She can pass for normal by wearing a crinoline with false arms, and occasionally does so.

Nancy's quote:
"Eight arms are better than two."

Ro-Co-Co

Ro-Co-Co is a clown. She is extremely thin, almost seven feet tall, and looks even taller because she wears shoes with springs. She paints her face in a frown, and in the show she has the dubious accolade of always being the performer who gets sprayed with water and suffers other unfortunate accidents. Out of costume she is a fairly ordinary person, and is married to the Bearded Lady.

Ro-Co-Co's quotes:
"A-A-A-TISHOO!"
"Do you want to come in the wagon for a cuppa?"

1 Entrance Gate
2 Ticket Booth
3 Roundabouts
4 Switchback
5 Waltzers
6 Sideshows
7 Booths
8 Big Top
9 Animal Enclosure
10 Food Storage

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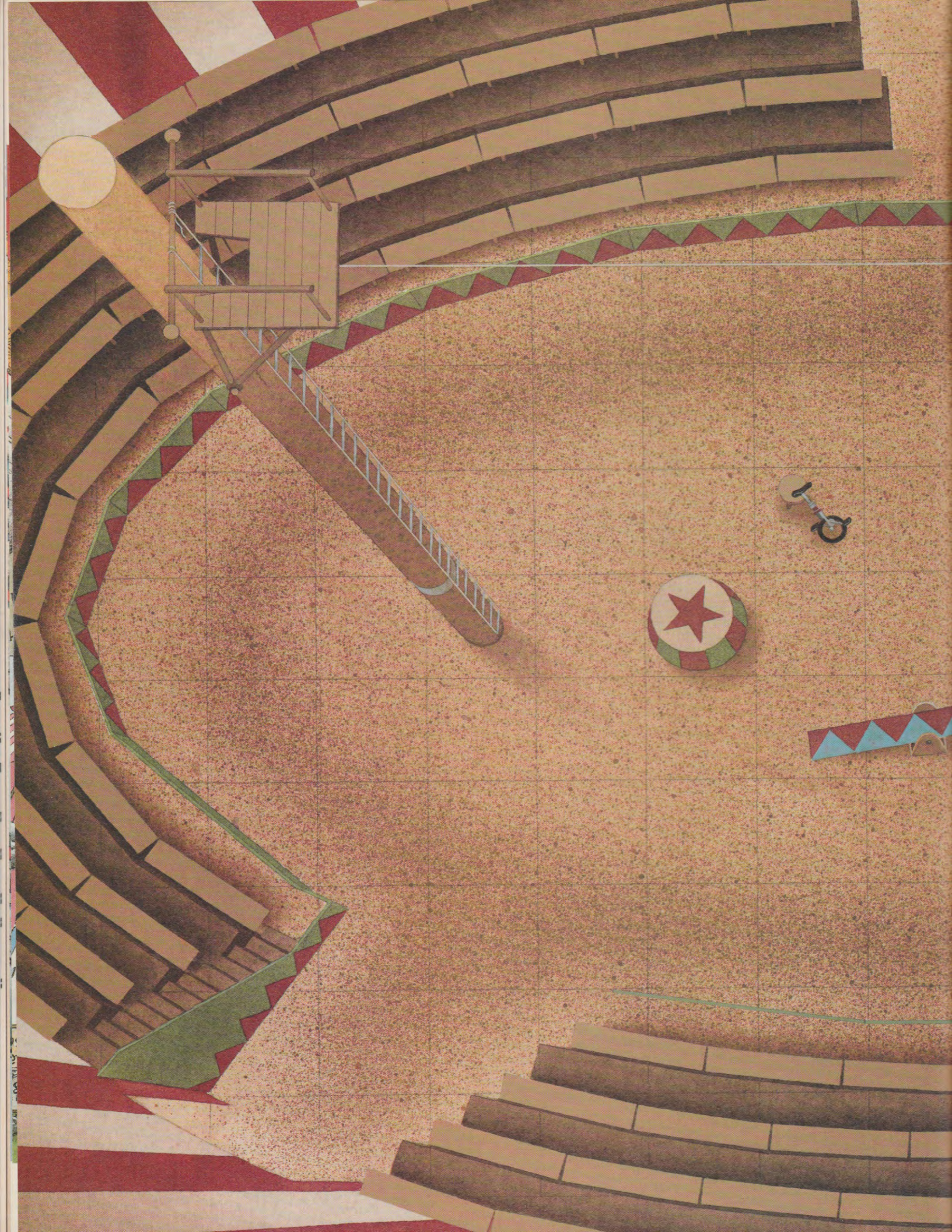

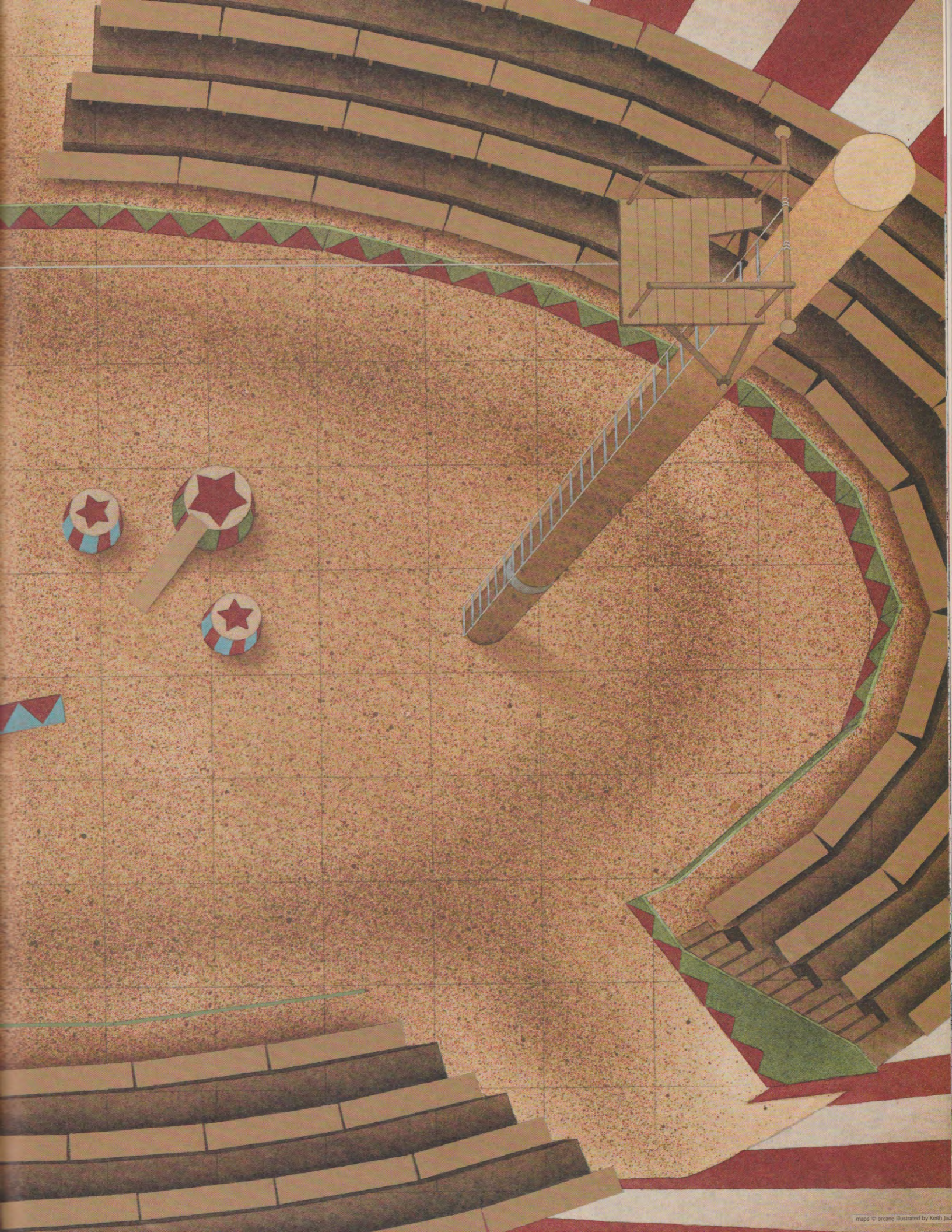
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Mark

The Bearded Lady is actually a man called Mark, with a very full golden beard and long golden hair, which he wears in a feminine style. He also wears make-up. He has fine features, so he looks convincingly androgynous. His feminine figure, enhanced by clothes, may be the result of mere fatness or surgery. He never removes his skirt in public. He was born in the show and thinks his job is perfectly normal, though he'd like to have enough talent to be listed on the poster along with his wife. He is extremely kind and considerate, and will talk happily to anyone he trusts.

Mark's quotes:
"I was born like this. I had no choice."
"Just let me fetch my jack."

Oliver and Olive

Oliver and Olive are trapeze artists, who put on daring and spectacular displays from the high wire. They are, not surprisingly, proud of their high billing. Oliver and Olive are from a foreign country and are never entirely confident that they have the legal right to be where they are.

Oliver's quote:
"Illegal immigrants? Oh no, I'm quite sure we signed all the right papers, didn't we Olive?

Hambaramba

Hambaramba is a lion tamer. Well, that's how he's billed on the poster anyway. He lets Polly do the taming, he just puts the animals through their paces in the ring. He isn't frightened of them... well, perhaps a little sometimes. He just prefers to leave them to Polly. Hambaramba is spectacular looking, extremely handsome, and what's more he wears few clothes in the ring. However, he's slightly insecure because he knows he couldn't manage without Polly. Hambaramba is always having relationships with the horse dancers and with marks, and then breaking up with them spectacularly.

Hambaramba's quotes:
"That's it Marmaduke, don't get too close now."
"What do you mean you don't love me any more?"

Polly

Polly is a talented animal trainer – she has a natural way with all the circus pets. She wears ordinary clothes and has a dread of performing, but she has no trouble keeping all the animals under control all the time. She is especially fond of the elderly lions, particularly Marmaduke.

Polly's quote:
"Lions are perfectly friendly creatures really, there's no need to be scared of them."

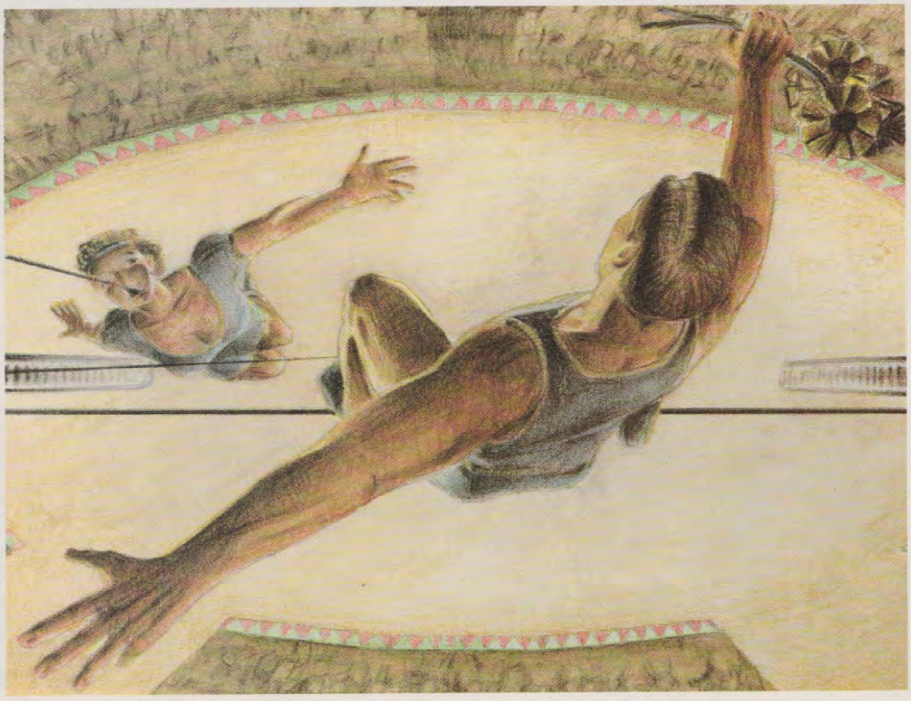
Adventure Seeds

Booths

If there is something the players really want, for instance Excalibur or the Ark of the Covenant, as a prize on one of the booths, they will try extremely hard to win it. If it is something that a rival group also wants, and violence is inappropriate, then a contest of knocking coconuts off sticks using just ping-pong balls, walking a very narrow plank blindfolded above an enormous tub of custard or trying to catch goldfish with bare hands can provide a highly amusing as well as tense contest. Of course, Excalibur could turn out to be a fake when they actually win it.

The Living Doll

One of the main features of many circus stories is the inanimate dummy or doll that comes to life with malevolent purpose. This can be worked into a game in any number of ways. Most obvious is the attack by swarms of tiny dolls armed with pins, but there are many more subtle things that can be done. An invasion of mind-control aliens, who look like dolls or soft toys and display themselves to be won on a booth, can be an interesting hook for an investigative game – why are all these people who have been to the circus acting so strangely? Or the creature could have belonged to a magician who brought it to life and now it lives on to fulfil some nefarious purpose. In running something like this it is always a good idea to keep the toy sinister and creepy, rather than making the horror overt. Hints for doing this include having them only move when nobody is looking at them, and making sure they never speak. A marionette, whose strings stand up but who is clearly not being controlled by anyone as it walks towards you in steely silence, can be a very frightening thing, as can a jack-in-a-box which opens on its own and laughs a maniacal laugh. This is bound to spook any party, no matter how hardened, investigating anything at the travelling show late at night.



Getting a Job at the Show

Anyone who can demonstrate a suitable useful talent will find it fairly easy to get a job at the show. Everyone will deny that they are hiring, but this is to put off enthusiastic kids; people who look as if they belong will be offered jobs if they make friends with any of the circus people. They will be expected to provide their own accommodation – tent or caravan – and their own booth or sideshow if necessary, as well as their own costumes if they are performing in the big top. However, this situation may vary depending on circumstances – a talking animal or other unique attraction will be provided if necessary.

The Tyrannical Clown

Cymberine has plans to take over the world, starting here. He has a talent for making people believe what he says when he says it, and he manages to manipulate the whole circus to get his own way. He plans to get on television and use this talent to become truly powerful. He does not have any plans to change anything, just to make himself loved. The PCs could become involved at any stage of this plan.

The Mysterious Disappearance

Someone has vanished from the town, or a body is found in mysterious circumstances. The circus is naturally implicated, and the PCs decide to investigate. This could lead to any number of potential adventures.

Suggestions for further inspiration

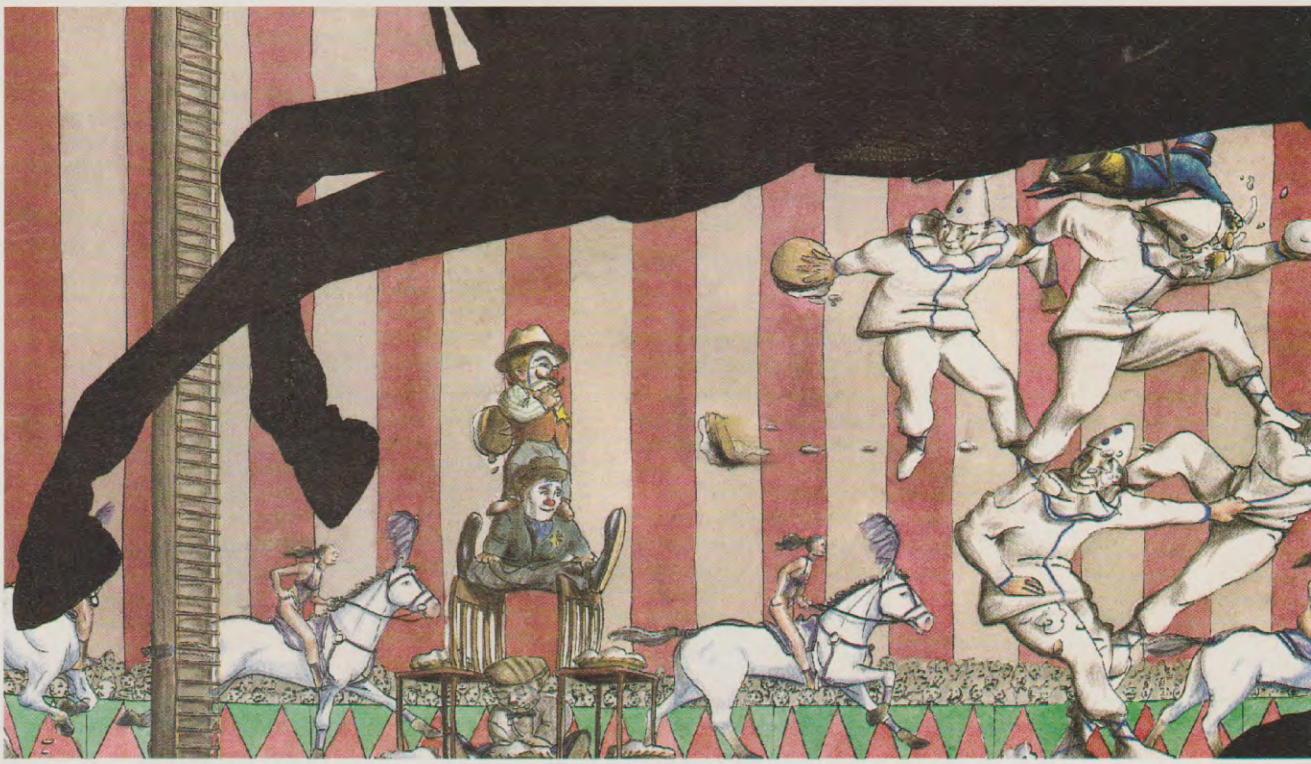
Tom Reamy's ***Blind Voices,*** Ray Bradbury's ***Something Wicked This Way Comes,*** Barry B Longyear's ***City of Baraboo,*** Charles Finney's ***The Circus of Dr. Lao*** – and visiting a real circus if you get the chance.

Mr. Theopolis' Thrilling Circus: Adventure

This adventure happens while the PCs are visiting the fair for some reason. Maybe they've just come to see the show, or maybe they're looking for a job.

The circus has been in town for some time, and audiences for its twice-daily shows are very low. The people who travel with the circus are getting increasingly restless because they see profits dropping, but the ringmaster, Mr. Theopolis, will not make the decision to leave town. The night before the PCs arrived, one of the horse dancers was found dead, her throat apparently ripped out by a wild beast. The circus hasn't called in the authorities (it's a tight-knit community which believes in policing itself), and the PCs are the first outsiders to find out about this. How they find out about it depends on why they are there. If they're looking for a job, maybe some of the circus folk will warn them off; they're all pretty upset by the killing, and anyone with a bit of empathy can sense this and maybe persuade them to talk. Maybe a couple of the horse dancers could be seen crying together. Hambaramba is under suspicion at the moment, and is locked in one of the caravans, being guarded by the strong man.

The true situation is this. For the last several months, Mr. Theopolis has been having an affair with Sintra. He's madly in love with her, and this has distracted him from everything, including the sorry state of the circus' finances. Some of the circus people know, and others don't but suspect something's going on. Recently, Madame Ninette has found out about this,

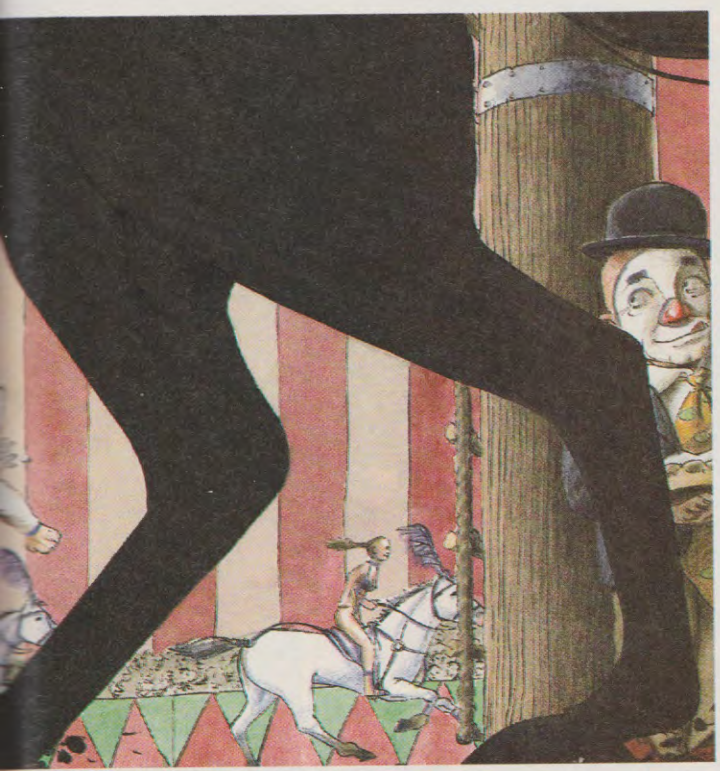


and is extremely jealous. And as if that's not bad enough, she's also a powerful witch. She has recently made a potion which allows her to turn into a wolf. While in human form, she's crippled and cannot get out of her wheelchair, but as a wolf she can roam free. She has decided to get her revenge on her husband by killing the horse dancers one by one, leaving his lover until last.

If Mr. Theopolis feels he can trust the PCs at all, he will hire them and beg them to find out who has caused the vicious murder – he knows he can trust them because they did not arrive until later. This will give them an opportunity to talk to people and get to know them. If possible, intersperse this with them practising their acts. The PCs should not be able to find out what caused the first murder, although it should become pretty obvious that it could not have been any of the animals – anyone with any knowledge of animals will realise that the teeth marks on the corpse are far too small to be those of the circus lions, but too large to have been left by any of the show's performing dogs.

The next night, a second murder occurs. The PCs should have no particular reason to suspect another horse dancer is going to be the victim, any more than any of the other circus performers, and it's not even certain that it's murder and not just a horrible accident.

After the second murder, though, evidence starts to mount up. Someone saw a large, dog-like creature prowling around the tents in the middle of the night. Either Clancy or Mark will tell the PCs about Mr. Theopolis' affair with Sintra. It seems to Ninette that the investigation is getting too close to home, and she decides the time has come to end it. She's determined to go out in a blaze of glory, and take her husband's precious circus with her.



The Finale

The grand finale of the adventure occurs during the evening performance of the circus show. The PCs should definitely be there, either in the audience or taking part. Make sure that whatever performance skills the PCs have, there's a place for them in the show.

The show starts off badly enough. There's a very small audience, and the people who have turned up are singularly unimpressed by the show. The applause is weak, and the performers are obviously disheartened by this and perform with a distinct lack of energy.

Then the excitement starts. Ninette, who is sitting watching the show, as she does every evening, is using her impressive mental powers to control two of the clowns in the performance. One of them has let out the lions, and she has used her mental skills to goad the latter into a ferocious rage. In the middle of the horse dancer's act, the lions come rushing out of the back in a terrifying killing frenzy, slashing repeatedly at the horses with their huge claws and eventually bringing one down, causing the rider to fall off. If the PCs don't intervene now, the lions will undoubtedly begin to savage the petrified and unfortunate horse dancer.

The audience thinks it's all part of the evening's entertainment, and suddenly becomes much more enthusiastic, shouting and cheering in renewed approval. However, those audience members who are nearest to the action are somewhat less sure (that looks like extremely realistic blood!) and some of them begin to panic.

At that moment, things start to get even worse (if that's possible). The two clowns, who are dressed in their best comic costumes, and acting in a typical clown-like manner (tumbling, falling over each other, generally being silly etc), come rushing out of the back, armed with meat cleavers. They suddenly begin slashing them about, and what's more they're heading straight for the front rows of the audience.

At this point, things could get horribly messy. It all depends on what the PCs try to do. If they're sensible and don't lose their heads (literally!), they'll somehow manage to disarm the clowns and get rid of the ferocious lions. If they're extremely clever, they'll manage to do that while making it look like part of the entertainment. If the audience can be kept calm, and the wounded taken off in a manner which makes it seem routine, the show will simply go on and the audience will love it. If the PCs manage to work out who's causing this (Ninette) they may go for her, in which case they'll soon have an enraged werewolf on their hands. ("Fantastic special effects," cry certain members of the audience – probably those nearer the back!) If the PCs are slow to act, there will almost certainly be a dreadful bloodbath, the circus will be closed down and Madame Ninette will have won.

Next month

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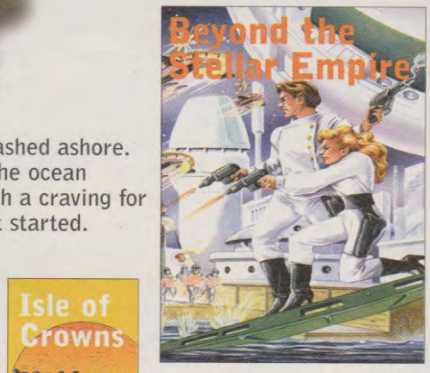

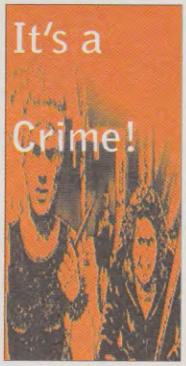

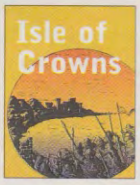

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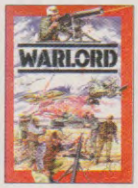

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THE arcane REPORT

What's it like to mingle with 30,000 gamers at America's largest gaming convention? Paul Pettengale was there...

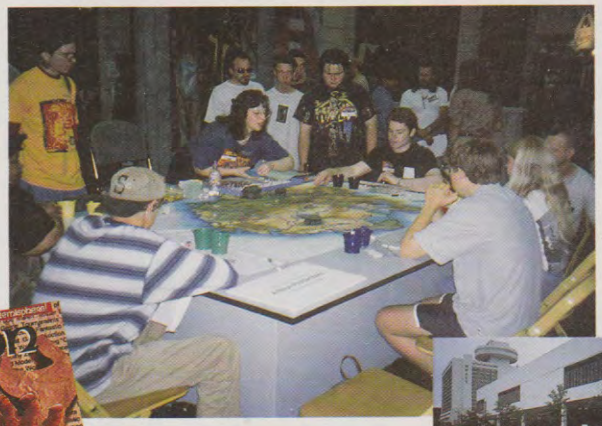
Friday 9th August. I'm getting involved in my first bit of live roleplaying ever, if you can call it that. Upon getting a special password wrong, and thus failing to gain entrance into the Safe House club in downtown Milwaukee, I'm forced by the doorwoman to pretend to be a cowboy, complete with hat, shouting "Yee-harr!" at the top of my voice and prancing around on an imaginary horse in the lobby. Unbeknown to me, I'm being secretly filmed and the whole humiliating experience is being broadcast on to wide-screen TVs scattered throughout the club. It was not a pretty sight.

Yes, this is GenCon town, and accompanied by Andy, **arcane's** deputy editor, and Dom, our advertising manager, the editor of your favourite gaming mag is being made a fool of (again). Still, we were here to have some fun, to engage in as much roleplaying as possible and to bring home all the latest gaming news and gossip. Pretending to be a cowboy was a start, one which got me wondering just how much weirder this trip was going to get.

GenCon, as we discovered after gaining our press passes and wandering, bleary-eyed into the main hall, it bloody big. No, it's bigger than that: with over 30,000 gamers from all over the world expected over its four-day duration, and more than 250 exhibitors, this was a staggeringly big convention – we were going to have difficulty seeing everything in the short time that we were there, let alone get involved in some demo games.

Day one for us (which was Friday – the joys of international travel kind of threw the spanner into the works that were Thursday), defied the usual definition of busy, though it did nothing but get busier throughout the weekend. Andy and myself spent three days scrabbling around as many of the major companies' stands as possible, introducing ourselves, handing out copies of the latest issue and dragging industry bods off to the bar (the *only* place in the whole of the convention where you could smoke, so we made it a regular haunt) for a 'chat' (for which read: plying them with beer in an attempt to get a long-term release schedule without them noticing).

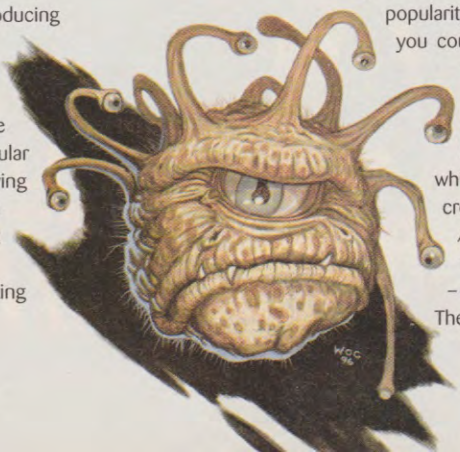
A number of *extremely* interesting things came to light...



The place: The Exhibition Centre, Milwaukee, USA. The show: GenCon 1996. The people: Just a few of the 30,000 gamers who made the pilgrimage to the US's largest gaming convention.

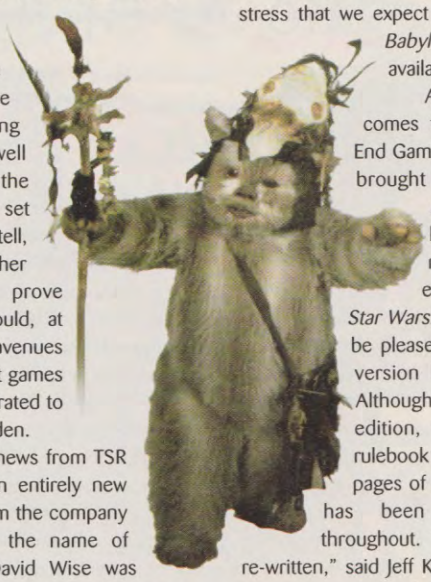
A RETURN TO RETRO

TSR was, not surprisingly, our first port of call. We had a lengthy discussion with David Wise, the company's Director of Creative Services, and Stephen Daniele, the Art Director. *AD&D* and the direction thereof were first on our list of Things We Want to Know About, and we were told that it's a return to retro that's in vogue in the TSR camp at the moment. In the next issue of **arcane** we'll be reviewing *The Rod of Seven Parts*, a mammoth campaign for 10th-12th level characters which deals, not surprisingly, with the quest to find the seven bits that make up the infamous artifact. The Rod has featured in ages-old *AD&D* mythology, and its return marks the beginning of the *Tome* series – a collection of campaigns based around relics from the early days of the game. David Wise explained: "Many of us played these early adventures, and now our kids are playing them. We want to give our kids more of an opportunity to go and, well, kill the stuff we killed when we started to play *D&D*". Cool, we say (as did a number of Americans throughout our visit, displaced only by the phrase, 'You're welcome,' for popularity). This trend, which I guess you could argue was started with the release of *Night Below* (see **arcane** 4 for a review), is set to continue with the *Monstrous Arcana* series, which is to feature major creatures made popular by *AD&D*. The first set in the series features the Beholder – read the review on page 72. The *Ravenloft* campaign world



is, as far as TSR's concerned, set for a face-lift and a 'downsizing' in the number of writers who are being commissioned to work on new material. The feeling in the TSR camp is that *Ravenloft* adventures of recent times just haven't been, well, scary enough, and the creative bods are looking to redress this problem. A select few writers are being put in charge of establishing a new feel for the setting, and the art, under the charge of Stephen Daniele, is being reworked so that it represents the feel of the campaign. "More browns and dark colours" are, apparently, what TSR is after in this department. We would say, then, that *Ravenloft* is to be completely revamped, but we wouldn't want to force such a dreadful pun on you.

A trend in the collectable card game and collectable dice game arena, which we saw globally applicable at GenCon, was for the release of 'easy-start' boxes. With *Magic,* Wizards of the Coast is releasing boxes consisting of two pre-designed decks with the aim of making learning the game straight out of the box that much easier. This is also the case for *Dragon Dice,* TSR's dice game (reviewed in **arcane** 1), which is being launched in the Battlebox, which again has two sides already put together, and with simplified rules which are intended to ease the learning of the game. There are two main reasons for this shift: first, it will make these games more commercially viable in the non-enthusiast arenas (in other words, you're more likely to see them appearing in traditional toy stores, and maybe even newsagents such as W H Smith), and second, it should make the games more appealing to young players, who may well have struggled with the complexities of the full set of rules. Only time will tell, of course, as to whether this strategy will prove successful, but it should, at least, open up new avenues for the sale of hobbyist games in a market that is saturated to the point of being sodden.



Finally, as far as news from TSR goes, there's to be an entirely new roleplaying system from the company next year, going by the name of *Alternity.* Although David Wise was cagey about the details, we can tell you that it will be a science fiction game and that, "It will be supported just as heavily by TSR as *AD&D* is." We wait with baited breath, but with new competition in the form of Marc Miller's *Traveller* (reviewed last issue), and *Fading Suns* (see the review on page 62), not to mention White Wolf's forthcoming sci-fi release, it's going to have to be good.

Yes, things did get a little strange at times, but, hey this is the USA after all.

Strong competition

Speaking of science fiction, we also managed to grab hold of the inordinately busy guys at Chameleon Eclectic, who are "almost done" in terms of getting the eagerly-awaited *Babylon 5* RPG out of the door. Unfortunately, they were unable to give us any more preview or review material – *Babylon 5* fans here in the UK will be distraught to hear that, as yet, Cameleon has been unable to organise a worldwide licensing deal with Warner Brothers. That means, until we hear otherwise (and let me stress that we expect to do so soon), the *Babylon 5* RPG will only be available in the States.

An old master when it comes to SF RPGs is West End Games, the company who brought us the superb *Paranoia* system (see last issue for our retro review) and the exceedingly popular *Star Wars.* Fans of the latter will be pleased to hear that a new version has been released. Although it's still 'only' 2nd edition, the new *Star Wars* rulebook has had around 100 pages of copy added to it, and has been made full-colour throughout. "It's been completely re-written," said Jeff Kent, West End's sales manager. Look out for our two-page review in the next issue of **arcane**, which is on sale Friday 4th October.

Due out late next summer (gulp!), and also from West End Games, is *Men in Black,* an RPG which is to tie in with a forthcoming

Coming out soon!

There were a great many important new releases previewed at GenCon this year – several dozen in fact. Here we've selected some of the more important ones, most of which will be reviewed in the next issue of arcane.

AD&D Core Rules CD-ROM

CD-ROM rules supplement for *AD&D* from TSR

You will have seen the adverts for the *AD&D Core Rules* CD-ROM for PCs advertised in the last few issues of **arcane**, and now we've finally got a copy. This is far more than a digital version of the *Player's Handbook,* the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* the *Monstrous Manual, Arms and Equipment* and the *Tome of Magic.* There are programs which enable players to create new characters, programs for creating dungeons and encounters, sample character sheets and a great deal more. Of course, you need a PC with a CD-ROM drive to use it, but for those DMs and players who've got one, this should prove to be an extremely handy disc to have at your disposal.

Cthulhu for President

Sourcepack for *Call of Cthulhu* from Chaosium

Chaosium is really pushing its whole line of games, *Call of Cthulhu* included. Having said that, not all of the new-future releases are all that serious. Take the *Cthulhu for President* pack, which is little more than a collection of posters and propaganda material with one aim in mind – to get Great Cthulhu voted in as President of the United States in the presidential elections late this year. With the motto: why stand for the lesser evil? Chaosium looks set to see the Great One himself reaching the position of the most important person on the planet in a scant three months.

Star Wars 2nd Edition

Revised edition of *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Games* from West End Games

Still ranking as one of the most popular films ever, George Lucas' *Star Wars* makes the ideal starting point for an epic space adventure RPG. This is not a new edition, but it has been revised and expanded with more than 100 pages of new information and a complete re-write of the rules. What's more, this new version of the *Star Wars* game features glorious full-colour throughout, including numerous stills from the movie trilogy.

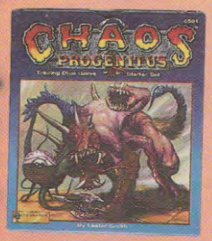
Rod of Seven Parts

An epic campaign for *AD&D* from TSR

We've been waiting a long time for this one. *The Rod of Seven Parts* is a hugely powerful artifact which dates back to the early days of *AD&D,* and now, for the first time, a full campaign for characters of levels 10-12 has been created which is built entirely around the acquisition of this most powerful of magical items. Coming in a boxed set (similar to the excellent *Night Below* campaign – see our review in **arcane** 4), this mammoth campaign should keep your adventuring party busy for months.

Chaos Progenitus

A trading dice game from Destination Games



Lester Smith, he of *Traveller* fame, has designed a new dice game and launched it under the banner of a new games company, Destination Games. We've been playing it, and we can assure you it's great fun. Each side controls a monster which is made up with a set of 13 dice, each one being a single body part. During your battle, you stun and wound various parts of the monsters' bodies until one monster is incapacitated. It's simple to learn, but there's a lot of hidden strategy tucked away inside this game.

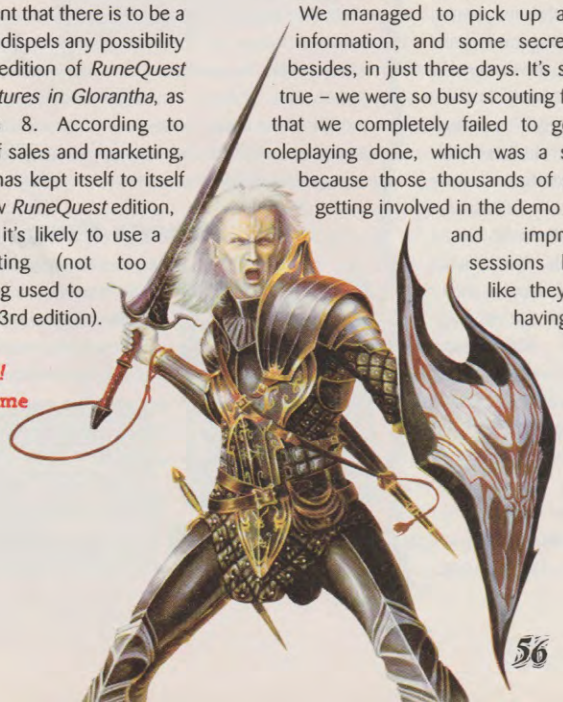
movie staring Tommy Lee Jones. All we know at this stage is that the film is to be about the men attired in black suits who operate 'in the background' for the US government, clearing up any evidence that aliens walk among us. Whether participants in the game will play members of this government agency, or people fighting to expose its activities is, as yet, unclear. Rest assured that we'll bring you more news closer to the time.

We heard few tales of woe at the show (the CCG market seems to have fuelled the roleplaying market if anything, and it certainly hasn't damaged it as the gloom merchants wanted us to believe), so it was for the most part good news that landed upon our ears. The best was from Chaosium, which is now employing more people than ever, with more staff set to join in the near future. The reason the company is employing at such a furious rate is simple: it's got a whole host of releases coming up over the next year or so, and it wants to make sure that they're all 'just right'.

The most interesting news to us (being long-standing *RuneQuest* fans), is that Chaosium will, for GenCon next year, be releasing a Gloranthan roleplaying game. This will be simpler in terms of rules structure than *RuneQuest,* though it shall obviously retain Greg Stafford's long-established setting, which has been the mainstay of the *RuneQuest* game for more than 15 years now.

The announcement that there is to be a game about Glorantha dispels any possibility of the rumoured 4th edition of *RuneQuest* being subtitled *Adventures in Glorantha,* as reported in **arcane** 8. According to Chaosium's director of sales and marketing, Eric Row, Avalon Hill has kept itself to itself on the subject of a new *RuneQuest* edition, but if it is to appear, it's likely to use a quasi-European setting (not too dissimilar to the setting used to illustrate rulings in the 3rd edition).

Look out for the *Elric!* CCG, coming sometime next year...



New Cthulhu material

Chaosium is best known, of course, for its *Call of Cthulhu* RPG, and Eric was keen to point out that there is a heap of supplements and new adventures on the way for that, with a 1920s almanac coming pretty soon. Linked to the *CoC* game is a new line of *Cthulhu*-inspired fiction and the Unlimited Edition of *Mythos,* the *Cthulhu* CCG. The latter uses a great deal of new art (though the core set of cards remains the same), and the border has changed slightly (it now looks more gold than brown). As with *Magic* and *Dragon Dice, Mythos* is to be released in a two-deck set to make it easier for new players to pick-up-and-play straight from the box. The Unlimited Edition of *Mythos* will also have a far wider distribution, appeasing those people who read all of the rave reviews (such as ours in **arcane** 7), but who were unable to find the game.

Chaosium has got two other CCGs planned. First, for release late summer next year, is the *Doom* CCG, based on the massively popular computer game by iD Software. The license for the *Doom* film has now apparently been signed, and Chaosium hopes to schedule the launch of the CCG to coincide with that release. "If that happens," says Eric, "we'll be printing ten times as many cards than if it doesn't." Which seems to make commercial sense...

The second CCG release will be an *Elric!* spin-off. Again, details are more than a little sketchy right now, but it's interesting to note that artist friends of Michael Morcock have agreed to get involved in the project. Expect to see that in about a year's time.

GenCon was a whirlwind affair for us. We managed to pick up all this information, and some secret stuff besides, in just three days. It's sad but true – we were so busy scouting for info that we completely failed to get any roleplaying done, which was a shame, because those thousands of people getting involved in the demo games and impromptu sessions looked like they were having fun. It was the fun atmosphere which, I think, made GenCon such a great convention – you should definitely make the effort to get out to Milwaukee next year, if you're at all able. And, of course, there's EuroGenCon, which starts the day before this issue of **arcane** hits the streets – I hope to see you there!

Hmm, yet more strange goings-on. We had fun though. Honest.

There is one snippet of info I can't help but hint at before I wrap up this report: the official *X-Files* RPG is on its way. I can't tell you which company has clinched the deal, but we spoke to the company's head honchos, and it's true, the game is out there, and we can't wait to see it. Maybe at next year's GenCon...

See you at EuroGenCon

Even though you've missed out on getting to this year's GenCon, there's still time (er, just about) to make it to **EuroGenCon**, the European version of TSR's huge gaming event. It starts on Thursday 5th September and runs through to Sunday 8th.

Those essential details: EuroGenCon takes place at Loughborough University, and you can book tickets for one, two, three or all four days. To organise tickets (or, at this stage, to ensure you can still get tickets on the door), call TSR on 01223 212517.

arcane will, of course, be there, and we hope to get the chance to meet as many of you as possible. We'll have copies of this issue on sale, and we'll be up for games of just about anything. We'll also be running a few games over the weekend, so come and ask us about what we'll be running, when, and if there are any places left. Don't worry about bringing characters because we'll provide them (likely games will be *AD&D 2nd Edition, Feng Shui, Shadowrun 2nd Edition* and *Paranoia 2nd Edition).* We'll also be up for all the games of *Magic* and *Netrunner* you care to challenge us to.

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Issue 6 explained why the Christian right want to ban RPGs, looked at the strange worlds of Steampunk, and reviewed *Netrunner*, *GURPS Goblins* and *Space Hulk 2nd Edition*. We also gave you a Keep in the Encounter pull-out.

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Issue 3 had a free RPG called *Skool Roolz*, reviewed *Cybergeneration* and *Warhammer Fantasy Battle CD-ROM*, had an article on making characters quirky and featured Mr Smith's Trans-dimensional Emporium as our pull-out Encounter.

Issue 7 explored terror in our feature on how to create a horror scenario. It looked at introducing time travel into your games, sent you to Prison in Encounters, poked fun at the way roleplayers view their dice and reviewed *Conspiracy X*.

Issue 10 saw the return of *Traveller* with a four-page review and a feature. We went to the *Magic* National Finals, visited The Dig in our pull-out Encounter and also reviewed *The London Guidebook* and *MissionForce: CyberStorm*.

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Issue 4 explained RPGs for beginners, discussed acting in our games, reviewed *Middle-earth: The Wizards*, *Legend of the Five Rings* and *Night Below*, while Stormburg, the flying extra-planar city materialised in this issue's Encounter.

Issue 8 suggested ways to introduce some mysticism back into your fantasy games. We also gave you the chance to try out 20 play-by-mail games for free, and we reviewed *Pendragon 4th Edition*, *Axis Mundi* and *Alliances*.

Issue 5 included Richard Garfield's ideas on *Netrunner*, a feature on roleplaying in Japan and reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, *Don't Look Back*, *Mage: The Ascension* and *Heresy*. The Train pulled into this month's Encounter.

Issue 9 showed you how to improve your playing skills. We laughed at refereeing mistakes and explained why soaps can be good for ideas. The Encounter visited RackModulo Inc., and *Wraith: The Oblivion* and *Dragon Storm* were reviewed.

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It's a Aff

Just how do you get experienc which don't earn them wodges family as a plot hook th

Trying to convince 14th level warriors and their mage-class peers that it's worth their while rescuing the latest in the line of princesses to have fallen into the clutches of evil can, it must be said, become a little tiresome sometimes. 'What's the point?' the party's cleric asks, 'I mean, we could buy her father's kingdom and have change out of a tenth of our wealth, why don't we go wage some war instead?' This attitude is almost inevitable in a PC's later life, and it's not an easy one to get the players to dispel.

"when playing family members, make a big effort to ham it up and make the player squirm."

The problem here is not restricted to powerful, experienced characters. The referee's job of getting any collection of player characters involved in a scenario is a tough one – the motivations of the characters definitely need to be considered, and the entry point into an adventure tailored to that motivation.

Family Ties

But there is a short-cut – a guaranteed plot hook which will play on any character's conscience, and get them involved in a scenario even if there isn't huge monetary reward at the end of it, or, in the case of *Call of Cthulhu* and similar modern-day games, if it doesn't fall within the boundaries of a character's job description. And just what is this sure-fire thing that will get any character involved in any scenario you care to chuck at 'em? Simple: it's their family.

Families are more often than not completely neglected in roleplaying games. Okay, so a player might state that her character is the daughter of a famous merchant who plundered India for spices in the middle 1800s when the character is first rolled up, but that's as far as any interaction with their family goes. Given the tremendous amount of time which most characters will have spent with their families, isn't it pretty likely that they're going to maintain at least some degree of contact with their loved ones? Or, at the very least, they're going to have an extreme fondness for their families which outweighs that which they can muster for anyone else.

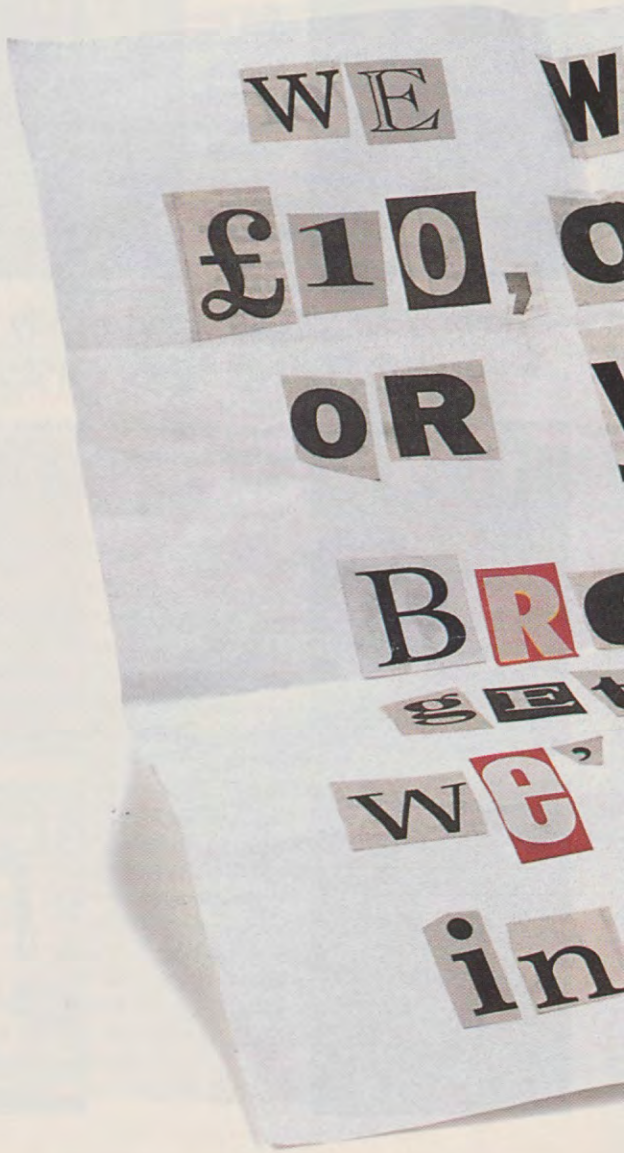
And this relationship can be played upon to get characters involved in scenarios. Because of the strong bond between a character and his or her family members, those characters should throw themselves full-heartedly into any scenario that involves his or her loved ones. The family element of a scenario can even be pretty tenuous – it may merely be the case that instead of being approached by an unknown merchant, or a faceless crime boss who has got 'a little proposition' for the party of characters in question, it's one of their fathers instead. The immediacy of the connection between the plot instigator (the father) and the person who's going to be acting out the plot is that much more likely to get the character involved in the game.

That's just one simple way of using a character's family to get them intimately involved in a scenario – there are many more far more ingenious and interesting ways to do it...

The kidnap scenario is a very common one in roleplaying games – rescuing X from Y is the basis of many a fantasy plot, but that X is, more often than not, a complete unknown to the party of characters. How about making X a close family member of one of the party – that should give the character a sense of urgency to get involved in the proceedings, and, hopefully, will give the referee the opportunity to 're-introduce' the character to his family, thus opening up more potential for all kinds of adventures (why was the chap's brother kidnapped in the first place, and just what is his sister Hannah up to these days?).

Rules of Conduct

It gets more interesting still when characters are forced to make morally-based decisions regarding the actions of family members. Old Pa might get in contact, informing a character that his brother 'has gone completely off the rails,' and he could really do with some help getting the upstart back on track – only, the character's 'little brother' is now a serious threat, rather than someone who merely threw worms at you. Or perhaps a cousin has committed a heinous crime against the state – does the character who's related make some effort to aid the cousin's escape, or does he help to make the case against the cousin by informing a court of law that he used to pull the legs off spiders when he was a kid? All sorts of ethical dilemmas ensue.



fAMILY AIR

*dventurers involved in scenarios ash? **Paul Pettengale** turns to the o character can ignore...*

Of course, the character may have a family himself that he's been keeping quiet from the rest of the party. Why not have a long-lost child turn up out of the blue (with a particularly vexing problem for the character to deal with)? That would certainly cramp his style for a while, and some memorable roleplaying sessions are sure to follow (you only have to think of recent episodes of *EastEnders* where David's son turned up and started making his life a misery – indeed, for some ideas on how watching soap operas can provide inspiration for roleplaying games, check out our feature 'Suds and Sorcery' in issue 9 of **arcane** – see page 57 if you missed it).

Ham it up

When playing a character's family members, make a big effort to ham it up to make the player squirm – I can't imagine that a burly fighter is going to appreciate being reminded that he used to habitually wet the bed when he was a kid in front of his fellows gamers. By using family members who would have known the character for much longer than he's been active in a game (which is inevitable, given that most characters start off in adulthood), it presents the referee with ample opportunity to bring in elements of the PC's distant past which even he doesn't know about (or perhaps wants to forget about) – these elements could and should lead to all manner of scenario ideas. The family is again a vehicle for bringing characters into scenarios without plots being forced upon them unnaturally.

Now that we've got some idea as to how families can be used in roleplaying games, let's take a look at a few plot threads you might like to consider in your scenarios, which involve various family members...

The funeral

A particularly good way to get a character involved in a scenario straight away is to stage the beginning at a funeral of one of his closest family members. The character's big brother has died, and a telegram or note has been delivered to inform him of the funeral details. During the funeral procession, one of the cars/carriages is run off the road by a small gang of vicious thugs, and a brick is thrown through the window. There's a note attached to the brick, addressed to the father of the deceased, stating that unless all of the money his son owed (he was killed by a remorseless loanshark) is paid in full, other members of the family are going to end up the same way. Of course, the sum demanded is far in excess of what the PC's father could possibly muster, and so he turns to the PC for some much-needed help and advice.

The kidnapping

A desperate plea is sent to the character – 'Help I've been kidnapped, and the people who are holding me are demanding £10,000 before Monday. They say they'll contact you very soon to tell you where to leave the money.' Contacting other family members reveals that they have also been sent similar ransom notes, and true enough, their mother has disappeared.

The truth of the matter, however, is that there has been no kidnap at all – the PC's mother has decided to take off, and is trying to muster as much money as she possibly can to fund her intended life of luxury. Will the PC and his fellow family members be taken in, or will they be able to uncover the truth? And just how badly will they react when they discover that their mother has tried to rip them off?

"Characters should throw themselves full-heartedly into any scenario that involves his or her loved ones."

The cult

She was always a little bit odd, but the PC never anticipated that his sister would join a strange religious cult, and yet that's exactly what happened, and not one member of the family has heard anything from her since. But now there are reports of strange goings-on at the cult's hideout in a nearby city, and a number of women have been found brutally murdered and mutilated. What's going on? And is the cult up to no good? Will the PC be able to forgive himself if his sister were to be found dead? He didn't really try to stop her joining the cult in the first place. So shouldn't he check out the cult for himself, and see if he can't liberate his sister from its seemingly dangerous and brain-washing clutches?

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The Month In Games

More games than pages...

LARGELY BECAUSE OF GENCON, August is always something of a bumper month for roleplayers and CCG fans alike, with nearly every company timing its releases to coincide with the USA's largest roleplaying convention.

So, this month sees the release of TSR's *Dragonlance: The Fifth Age* – the company's first new roleplaying system in some time – together with *Fading Suns* from newcomer Holistic Design, a new edition of FASA's hugely successful *BattleTech* and White Wolf's new CCG *Arcadia*. And that's just for starters...

Our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all of the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. If it's praised in **arcane** you know you can buy it with confidence.

All our reviews are by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games that you do. This definitely is *the* place for definitive reviews of games and expansions.

A lot of the stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by various distributors, so the prices we give are guidelines only.

Pick of the month

Fading Suns
Page 62

"Impressive and well put together"

"An able system, which stresses dynamic play."

Dragonlance
Page 66

The Icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Roleplaying systems

Collectable card games and expansions

Board games, miniature systems

Dice games and expansions

Computer games and utilities

Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.
Score 9/10 Excellent, a classic. Highly recommended.
Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.
Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.
Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.
Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.
Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.
Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.
Score 2/10 Very poor, should be avoided.
Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

The index

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Fading

The future doesn't look too bright in Holistic Design's first roleplaying game...

Three thousand years in the future, the remnants of human civilisation are emerging from a Dark Age that's lasted 1,000 years. A new Emperor has risen after nearly half a century of war, seeking to reunite the scattered human worlds and return to the glory of previous times.

But the newly-crowned Alexius Hawkwood I faces many enemies and obstacles. The Noble Houses plot and scheme, each seeking to replace him with one of their own, as does the monolithic Universal Church, pursuing its ancient dream of theocratic rule. The powerful Merchant Guilds, remnants of the mighty megacorporations that once ruled in the time of the Second Republic, have a strong grip on the commerce and economy of human space, and are unwilling to relinquish their hold. From beyond the borders of the Empire, barbarian fleets from lost worlds raid shipping lanes and fight for territory. Mysterious alien races pursue their own agendas, and the horrific Symbiots – parasitic mixtures of human and alien – struggle to break through the blockades and infect more worlds. And slowly the suns are beginning to die. No-one knows why these mighty lights are dimming, but across the Empire crops are failing and people starve.

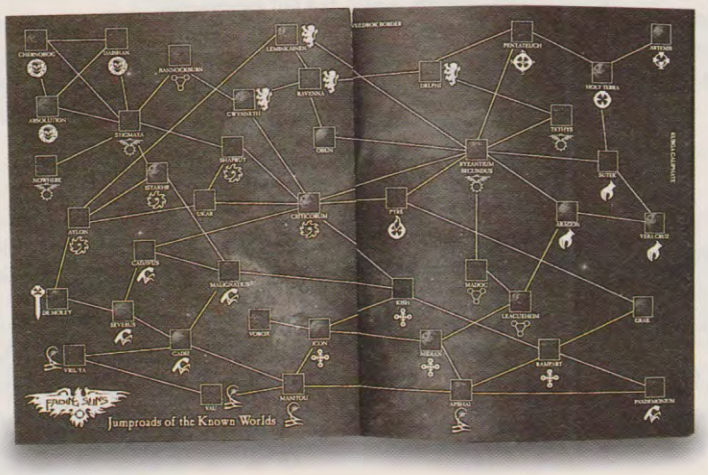
This grim universe is the setting for *Fading Suns*, the first roleplaying game from newly-formed Holistic Design. Weighing in at just over 270 pages, it's an impressive piece of work, split into nine chapters.

After a scene-setting prologue (a letter from a priest to his uncle) and the 'what is a roleplaying game?' introduction, Chapter One describes the history of the game universe from prehistoric times to the 'present' day of 4996, and then describes each of the major factions at work in the Empire (no less than five major Noble Houses, six Sects of the Church, five main Guilds, three important alien races and the two largest barbarian cultures) in detail, as well as covering many smaller groups.

Chapter Two then dives into the rules system proper. Characters in *Fading Suns* are described by characteristics and skills, both of which range from 1 to 10 for a human (with 3 being average). When attempting a task, the player adds his character's skill and a relevant attribute to arrive at a goal number for the task, which may be further modified depending on the difficulty of the task. The player then tries to roll the modified goal number or less on a 20-sided dice. If successful, the number rolled is the number of successes scored. These successes are either used as is to adjudicate the result, or (as in combat) divided by three to arrive at a number of victory dice. A roll of exactly the goal number is a critical success, doubling the number of successes scored, and a roll of 20 is a critical failure.

So, for example, if a character is trying to shoot someone, the goal number is Dexterity + Shoot (say 6 and 7, for a total of 13). If the player rolls a 10, he

"Imagine a combination of *Dune* with a touch of *Warhammer 40,000* and the odd dash of *Star Wars*, all skilfully blended together."

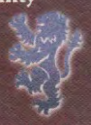


Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy...

Players in *Fading Suns* can choose their character's backgrounds from nearly all of the major factions struggling for supremacy. Each has unique strengths and weaknesses, its own agenda and desires, and many bear grudges against each other. Between them, they enable almost any type of character imaginable...

The Nobility

The Imperial Phoenix


House Hawkwood

House Decados

House Hazat

House Li Halan

House al-Malik

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Eskatonic Order

Temple Avesti

Sanctuary Aeon

The Merchant League

The League Sign

Reeves

Charioteers

The Muster

Supreme Order of Engineers

Alien Races

Vau

Symbiots

Suns

A roleplaying game | £TBA | Holistic Design

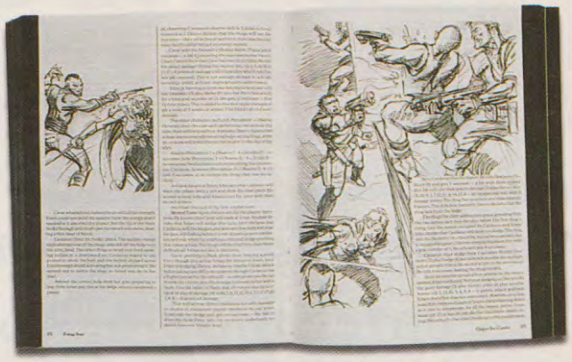
001 770 934 9131 | Out in September

And the players said...

STEVE: "I prefer my science fiction a little harder, but a good game nonetheless."

PAUL: "I definitely like the background and the rules seem to work just fine. Good stuff."

EDDIE: "The White Wolf influence is obvious, but that's not necessarily a bad thing."



hits with 10 successes. This is divided by 3 for 3 victory dice. These are added to dice rolled to determine damage.

With the basics of the system explained, Chapter 3 goes on to deal with aspects of character generation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the backgrounds of the game's designers (see bottom-right sidebar), this bears a strong resemblance to White Wolf's *World of Darkness* system, and is split into a number of stages. First the player decides on a rough character concept, then chooses a role (the group to which the character belongs, such as a wily noble from House Decados or a deadly holy warrior of the Brother Battle sect of the Church). The player then splits 20 points among the characteristics, which are split into three categories – Body (Strength, Dexterity, Endurance), Mind (Wits, Perception, Tech) and Spirit (Extrovert vs Introvert, Passion vs Calm, Faith vs Ego, Human vs Alien). Body and Mind characteristics all begin at 3. Spirit characteristics, on the other hand, are paired. The player must choose one characteristic in each pair to be dominant (which begins at 3), making the other secondary (which begins at 1).

Then 30 points are divided among skills (which are split into Natural and Learned – all Natural skills start at 3, while some Learned skills can only be acquired by certain backgrounds). Next the player chooses 10 points of Benefices – background advantages such as equipment or noble rank – and may choose some Afflictions, background disadvantages such as a cloistered upbringing.

Finally, the player gets 40 'Extras' points to spend on anything he or she likes, including Blessings – special abilities such as cybernetics or ambidexterity. More Extras points are gained from Afflictions or Curses (the opposite of Blessings). Extras can also be spent to give the character magical powers, in the form of Psi or Theurgy.

The rest of the book deals with specifics of the game system and background in detail, including descriptions of all the various Traits, rules for Occult powers (Psi and Theurgy), Technology, Gamemastering and Planets.

On the whole, *Fading Suns* is a very good game. The background is well-designed and highly detailed, and its 'medieval science fiction' style allows for an impressive range of game styles and types of adventure. The rules openly admit that the setting was specifically designed to allow for this, but it has been achieved without giving the game an inconsistent or messy feel. Imagine a combination of the universe of Frank Herbert's *Dune* with a touch of Games Workshop's *Warhammer 40,000* and the odd dash of *Star Wars*, all skilfully blended together, and you'll have a rough idea of what it's like.

The system does a good job of complementing the atmosphere of the game, being simple enough not to get in the way too much, but offering enough detail to make things interesting. The only real problem that crops up in play is the use of 20-sided dice for damage resolution – rolling 11 D20s and sorting them into those that do damage and those that don't is somewhat laborious, and it would have been a lot simpler to use D6s.

For a first edition rulebook from a new company, *Fading Suns* is also remarkably typo-free, well laid out and easy to read. It's not, however, without the odd problem. There's a tendency to refer to things before they've been explained, and sometimes things aren't defined in the chapters you'd expect them to be – the index helps a lot here, but things can still be a little confusing. Likewise, a couple of things really aren't explained too clearly (the points costs of cybernetics, for example).

Despite these niggles, though, *Fading Suns* is an impressive and well put together game, with a unique background that sets it apart from the other sci-fi games currently available. If you're looking for a darker future for your players, this is worth the money.

Andy Butcher

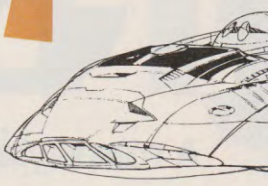
Score 8/10

A line of supplements for *Fading Suns* is already in the works, with a sourcebook describing Byzantium Secundus (the capital planet of the Empire) due first in October, followed by a technology guide in December. Look out for reviews in future issues of **arcane**.

Holistic Design is also working on a computer strategy game, *Empire of the Fading Suns*, which allows you to take charge of one of the five major Houses in the Emperor Wars, struggling to overcome your enemies and be crowned Emperor.

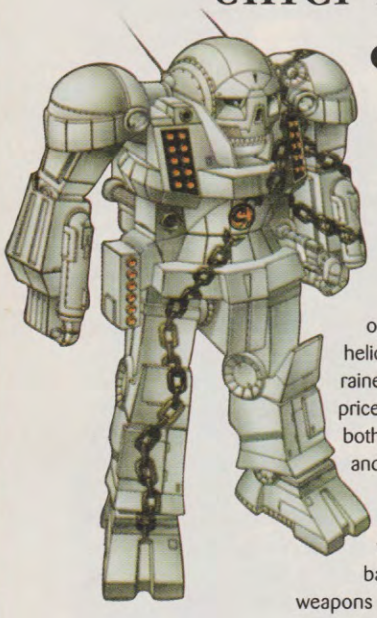
Fading Suns was designed by Bill Bridges and Andrew Greenberg, former developers of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* at White Wolf.

BattleTech 4th Edition



A tactical board game | £TBA | FASA | 001 312 243 5660 | Out in September

Enter the war-torn Inner Sphere and take command...



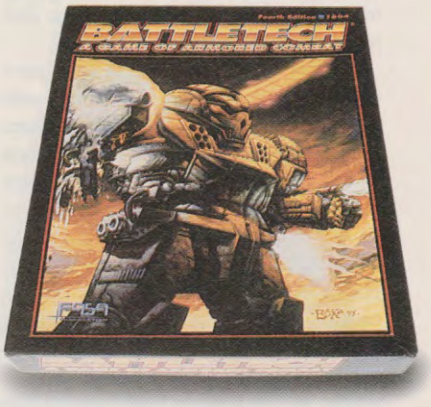
For centuries, the face of warfare remained static in the Inner Sphere. Infantry and armoured companies scrambled for control of strategic positions on the battlefield, while overhead helicopter gunships and jet fighters rained death down upon the land. The price of such engagements was high, both in terms of resources and lives, and they would often rage for years.

This all changed with the advent of the BattleMech, vast war machines towering over the battlefield, impervious to the weapons of all but the heaviest tanks, weighing as much as 100 tons each. With only a single pilot controlling a terrifying array of weapons, a single company of these leviathans could dominate the field of combat. Since their creation, some 500 years ago, these machines have seen action on virtually every planet in the Inner Sphere, and they are now considered to be the kings of the battlefield.

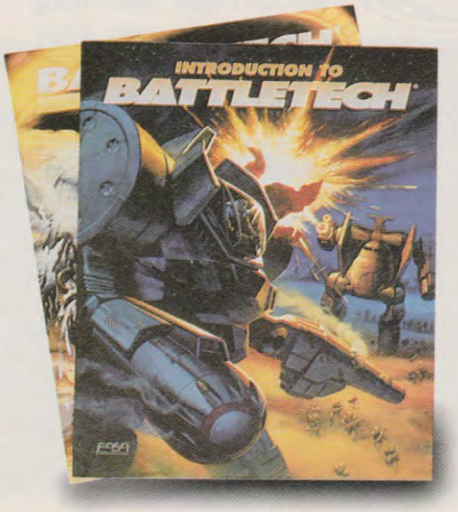
BattleTech 4th Edition propels you into the war-torn Inner Sphere, with its five warring houses. While the diplomats and assassins plan and conspire in the halls of power, it is your task to command the forces on the front line.

The range of supplements available for *BattleTech* is staggering, but for those who have never played the game before, this is what you need. Inside the box you find a basic introduction to the game, a 48-page rulebook detailing combat and 'Mech design, plus gridded battlemaps, playing pieces, record sheets and dice. Everything you require to set you off on the road to glory... or oblivion.

Right, down to the basics. A BattleMech consists of an armoured chassis, humanoid in form, layered with thick plates of reinforced armour. Movement of the limbs is controlled directly from the pilot's neural output, and transferred to thick bundles of a material called Myomer which reacts in a similar manner to human muscle, though on a much greater scale having to move the vehicle's vast weight. Each 'Mech can be armed with a range of weapons, from machine guns and flame-throwers to laser cannons, particle weapons and missile launchers, all capable of blasting enemy 'Mechs into piles of molten slag. At the core of each 'Mech is a fusion reactor, providing the vast power needs of the vehicle's weapons and mechanics. Although a formidable war machine, the 'Mech does have one weakness: heat. The build-up of heat from the machine's reactor and weapons can quickly shut the 'Mech down if it's left unchecked, and if ignored for too long this can eventually kill the pilot. To counter this potential disaster, heat sinks are placed all over the surface of its body, bleeding the thermal energy out into the air.



"*BattleTech 4th Edition* has everything you need to wage war in the 31st century."



For novice players, the introduction book provides a quick-start guide. This takes the player through the basic rules required to play. Starting with movement and terrain, the guide then goes on to explain combat and the effects of damage on the 'Mech. All of this information is laid out in a clear manner, with tables and diagrams accompanying it to illustrate further. These are only the basic rules, ignoring several aspects such as heat, critical damage and special manoeuvres. However, for the first-time player, they

FASA also produces a roleplaying game set in the *BattleTech* universe, called (appropriately enough) *MechWarrior*. Many of the sourcebooks are useful for both games.

provide an excellent lesson in basic BattleMech operations.

Next the introduction takes the player on a whistle-stop tour of the Inner Sphere, with its five Houses battling for domination in the war-torn 31st century. Finally, an overview of the BattleMech is included, with tactical reports on a number of the more common BattleMechs which compose the armed forces of the Inner Sphere. This entire book is full colour with numerous colour illustrations, and should aid those who feel somewhat daunted by the complexities of the game.

Once the player feels ready for a more involved game, its time to take a look at the main rulebook. This follows the same format as the introduction book, detailing the order of play and rules for movement, combat etc. However, the rules provided here are far more in-depth, detailing factors such as pilot ability and health (just because your 'Mech survived the autocannon strike, there is no guarantee that your pilot will). The movement rules detail more complex manoeuvres such as dropping to the ground and twisting your 'Mech's torso while moving. Also included in this section are rules for falling and involuntary manoeuvres (look out for that cliff, Blue 3!).

The combat section is far more detailed as well, covering the entire spectrum of BattleMech conflict. This may surprise players who until now have only played the basic game, because they are confronted with the possibility of critical damage to 'Mechs. This can range from limbs becoming inoperable or destroyed, to the 'Mech's gyro system becoming damaged, thus rendering it highly uncoordinated. Even the possibility of the 'Mech's head being taken clean off comes into play here, so good luck. One major aspect of combat untouched by the introduction is a mêlée between 'Mechs (quite a daunting prospect). Rules for punching, kicking and charging are detailed, as is my personal favourite 'death from above', the ability to dive feet-first on to the head of another 'Mech, usually only available to 'Mechs fitted with jump jets.

As mentioned, the effects of heat first come into play here. In the midst of battle, a BattleMech generates a vast amount of heat from its reactor, weapons and the blasts caused by enemy weapons. Although all 'Mechs are equipped with heat sinks to bleed off heat, continuous activity will soon have a negative effect on the machine. As heat rises, the movement of the 'Mech will be reduced, followed by targeting difficulties, and then the possibility of reactor failure. The MechWarrior may choose to override the shutdown, but as the heat increases so does the possibility of meltdown, plus there is the danger that any ballistic ammunition (such as autocannon shells and missiles) will detonate in the heat, ripping the location which houses it apart. Still, nobody said this was going to be a walk in the park, did they?

A number of scenarios are provided, utilising the playing pieces and hex-maps provided in the box. These should act as an excellent starting point for the players' careers as MechWarriors, allowing them to get to grips with the strategies and tactics which could one day dictate the course of an entire war. Finally, there is the design system, giving the players an opportunity to create their own 'Mechs and then test them out on the battlefield. It's good to see that these rules have been kept short and sweet, so the players won't be overwhelmed with design options. As with previous releases, full record sheets are provided for the 'Mechs detailed in the game, so you can begin playing immediately. The presentation of this edition is of an excellent standard with full-colour playing pieces and colour maps, but (and I hate to say it) some of the black and white artwork is a tad dodgy – still, you can't have everything.

BattleTech 4th Edition does exactly what it sets out to do – introduce players to the world of *BattleTech*. For those roleplayers who feel they want more after fighting a few battles, there is an enormous range of expansion material for the game, both in terms of rules additions and background material. But in the meantime, *BattleTech 4th Edition* has everything you need to wage war in the 31st century.

Alex Bund

Score 8/10

And the players said...

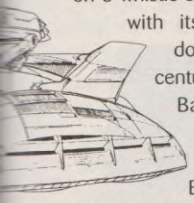
RICH: "I was daunted at first, but after a few games I was destroying light 'Mechs with the best of them!"

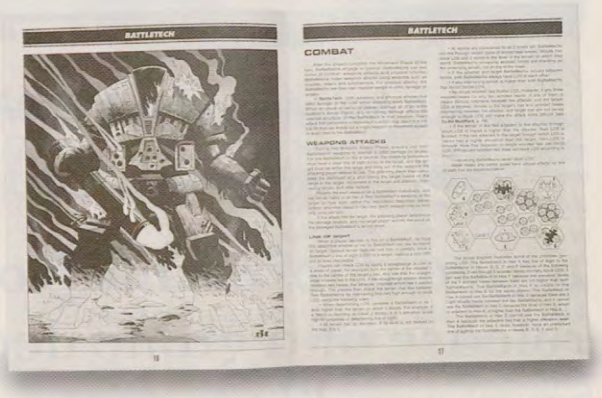
MARK: "Wow! I've been playing with the *Compendium* and the *Tech Readout* books for a while, but it was nostalgic to be back in the cockpit of a Panther again."

PHIL: "I had a laugh, but I can see it getting a little boring if you play with just the one set for too long. Not bad, though."

FASA Interactive is working on computerised versions of *BattleTech* for a number of games systems. FASA also cooporated with Activision to produce the *MechWarrior 2* game for the PC.

There's a huge range of supplements and sourcebooks already available for *BattleTech*, and many more on the way from FASA. You can add new 'Mechs, new weapon systems, even rules for aircraft and other military vehicles such as tanks.





Dragonlance: Fifth Age

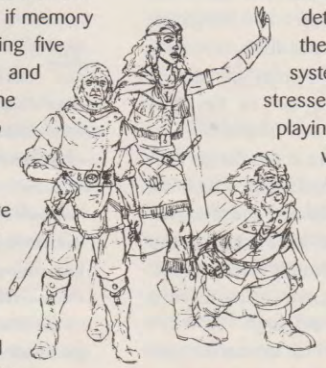
A roleplaying game | £TBA | TSR

01223 212517 | Out in September

Dragonlance comes of age with the release of a game dedicated entirely to this heroic gameworld. And it's nothing like *AD&D*.

There are three booklets in the box, all A5 (128 pages, 96 pages and 48 pages respectively), a deck of Fate Cards consisting of 82 cards, 18 character cards depicting famous characters from the *Dragonlance* novels, and a huge map of Ansalon – the part of Krynn in which the game is set.

It was one of the longest series of modules ever. 14 parts, if memory serves me well, spanning five years of development and publishing. Some of the old *AD&D* players I keep in touch with still speak of it as one of the most memorable campaigns they've ever been involved in. I refer, of course, to the *Dragonlance* series, which kicked off with the 1st level adventure, *Dragons of Despair* and culminated in the apocalyptic *Dragons of Triumph*. Since that original campaign, the Dragonlance world of Krynn has been fleshed out with dozens of further game-related releases, and a bewildering collection of novels. And now, some 12 years after the release of the first part of that epic campaign, comes a brand new roleplaying system set in the Dragonlance world. *Dragonlance: 5th Age* takes Krynn out of the *AD&D* universe, and plants it firmly and squarely in a game setting which is entirely distinct.

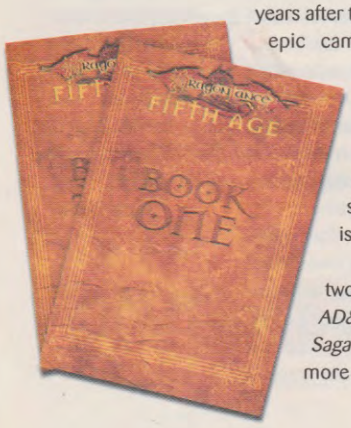


And it has to be said that the two games – the mother system *AD&D* and the new *Dragonlance Saga Rules System* – couldn't be more different. Where *AD&D* is complex, verbose, highly detailed and rule-bound, the diceless *Dragonlance* system is flexible, quick and stresses the importance of playing heroic roles in the world of Krynn rather than replicating a quasi-reality and trouncing anything which is uglier than you are.

You might have picked out the word 'diceless' in that last paragraph. This remarkable move (for TSR, anyhow), away from the use of dice marks, I think, a shift which we'll see in future releases from the gaming giant (and for more on what TSR is planning in the not-too-distant future, see our GenCon **arcane** report starting on page 54). Instead of dice, cards are used to 'roll-up' characters, determine success of actions, and, of course, to resolve combat. Here, briefly, is how it works...

Instead of throwing dice, each player holds a hand of cards with values on them (1-10, the higher being better). The size of the hand is determined by how many quests (scenarios) the character has managed to complete. Whenever a skill test has to be made, or a combat chance has to be worked out, the player chooses a card and plays it, adding the value on the card to an attribute number. If the total is higher than the value required (as set by the referee), he succeeds. This cuts out some of the randomness of dice throws, enabling the player to keep the high-point cards in his

"I thought it was fun, fast and replicated the feel of what *Dragonlance* is all about."



hand ready for when he *really* needs to succeed in a skill test.

The dramatic roles of *Dragonlance* characters is stressed throughout the manual, and again, it marks a complete departure from the *AD&D* system. For instance, the rules point out that in fantasy books, the characters never have to go shopping for the 30 foot rope and the iron spikes that they use throughout the adventure, it's just assumed that they've picked them up at some point. Likewise with the *Dragonlance* rules – why bother with the mundane exercises such as booking yourself into the local inn and stocking up on foodstuffs when you can spend that gaming time far better actually 'being a hero' down in the dungeon or wherever the scenario happens to be set? This makes a great deal of sense, and to a certain extent brings TSR

up to date with the current trends in roleplaying games design *(Feng Shui,* for example, takes a similar point of view – you don't have to go and buy weapons, you've got whatever you want if it makes the story more interesting).

The Dragonlance world has, of course, been brought completely up to date – as the full name of the game would suggest, the game is based in the new Krynn era, that of the Fifth Age, also known as the Age of Mortals. Man is now the dominant force in Ansalon, though the Dragon Lords remain. It's a time of chaos, with rival factions vying for power and the Dragons desperately attempting to reassert their authority. It makes for a turbulent, often bitter campaign world, but one in which the strong prevail – and hopefully the player characters (or the Heroes as they're called in the game, characters are NPCs with whom the party interact) will be a part of this faction. I won't give too much away about how Krynn has changed with the dawn of the Fifth Age, but I will say that however familiar you are with the *Dragonlance* novels, there's still a great deal of new material here for you to get well and truly stuck into.

"It is those who have enjoyed the novels who are most likely to revel in this game."

Indeed, it is those of you who have enjoyed the novels who are most likely to revel in this game. Frequent mention is made of the characters and situations which have appeared in the novels, and throughout the first reading the amount of assumed knowledge is seemingly too high. However, the world is fleshed out adequately, so you should be able to cobble together a decent campaign having never read a single *Dragonlance* novel.

It took me a while to decide the type of gamer that this system is aimed at. At first I thought it was the ideal beginner's RPG – the basic set of rules don't bewilder, and there's plenty of advice for new referees. Having said that, upon playing a few sessions, it became apparent that the referee is called upon to make a number of arbitrary decisions (especially as far as the effect of spells is concerned – this is an 'open' spell system, so there's no set spell list; the player describes what his hero is attempting using the magical abilities open to him, and then the referee has to decide to what extent the hero is successful). This implies that an experienced referee is recommended for running this game.

In truth, I think it's a system that can be easily adapted by anyone – it gives you the freedom to get out of it exactly what you want, rather than pinning you down to a certain style of play (unless, of course, you want to play a rules-heavy system with no emphasis on roleplaying and heroic action). So, *Fifth Age* is an able system, which stresses dramatic play, cuts out the randomness of dice throws, and which is set in a colourful campaign setting (with bags of novel-based background to draw on). It won't be to everyone's tastes, but I for one thought it was fun, fast and replicated the feel of what *Dragonlance* is all about.

Paul Pettengale

Score 8/10

If you want some light reading of the *Dragonlance* variety, hunt out the first trilogy of novels. They fell under the heading of *The War of the Lance* and were written by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis.

Heroes of a New Age

Thankfully, unlike with many new systems which merely include a 10-page (or so) adventure at the back of the book, Dragonlance: Fifth Age has a full booklet dedicated to the sample scenario. The 48-page Heroes of a New Age is, not surprisingly, aimed at new heroes, and concerns the retrieval of a valuable stolen gem. Even though it's designed for low-level characters, there's plenty of action – the party have to survive an attack from a green dragon and negotiate their way through the underground caverns of a dwarven nation. It's very good, if somewhat predictable, stuff.

Arcadia: The W

A CCG based on *Changeling: The Dreaming*

£1.75 for each 15-card Story Pack or Character Pack

White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 **Out now**

An RPG by any other name.

The Wyld Hunt is the name of the first part of the *Arcadia* campaign trilogy. The second part, *King Ironheart's Madness*, will be out this autumn followed by *The Lion's Den* in early 1997.

Ever since roleplaying games first came out designers have been trying to create a satisfying board or card game which captures the essence of an RPG. *Arcadia* is White Wolf's attempt to follow in the footsteps of *Mystic Wood, Dungeon* and *Talisman,* but using the CCG format. Mike Tinney, *Arcadia's* designer, said, *"Arcadia* is presented in a single character perspective. You don't simply play some nameless magician or a crew of characters wandering around dark dungeons killing the first monster found. You play a single character which you define yourself, not from random generation, but from cards that you choose. This provides players with the opportunity to create their own characters based upon what type of adventure they enjoy playing, and this adds more of a roleplaying element to the game."

Arcadia is essentially a high fantasy game in which players move their characters around a card-based board in a race to achieve objectives. It has a comparable concept and playing area to *Mystic Wood,* a similar style to the *Changeling* RPG and, of course, the sales advantages of a CCG. *Arcadia* is also cheaper than most CCGs – at least initially. All each player needs to begin with is one Character Pack and one Story Pack which are the size of standard boosters – there are no boxed starter sets. However, the two packs won't necessarily guarantee you a good game because you may not get the ideal character cards to match the quest. So naturally, just as in most CCGs, if you get hooked on it you are very likely to spend a vast amount of money on the game.

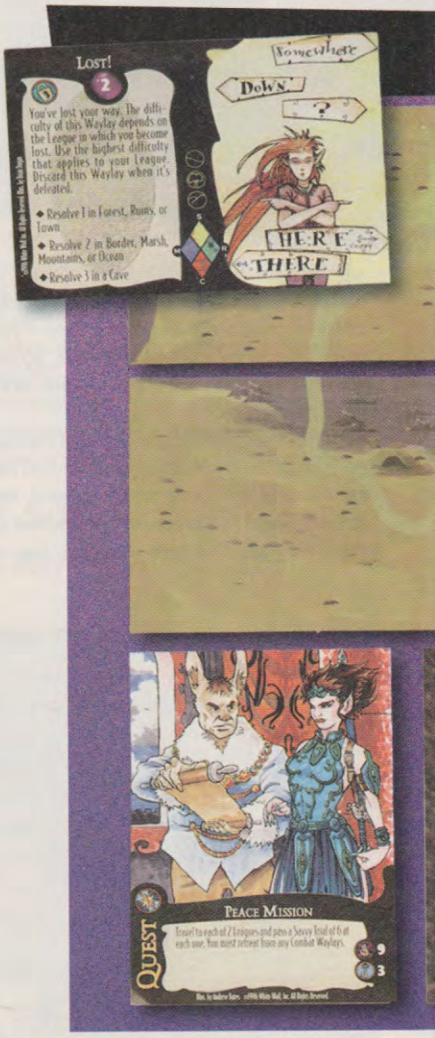
Each Character Pack contains all you need for a single character. You get one 3D pop-up cardboard figure which portrays a particular race – male or female – with attributes, special abilities and flavour text. The 3D character cards are a wonderful piece of design – they look great, are easy to use, have all the information on them you need and they fold up to fit within the booster pack format.

"If you get hooked you are likely to spend a vast amount of money on the game."

To personalise your character you choose Merits and Flaws which are also represented by cards. Merits have a positive point value and Flaws a negative value. You have to select five points-worth to give your character abilities, magical arts, treasures and so on. Choosing Flaws frees up some extra points to spend on Merits. Then all you have to do is make up your character's name and background.

The game mechanics are pretty straightforward. Each character has three attributes – Might, Savvy and Resolve. To overcome a test in the game you roll a D6 and add the appropriate attribute's value to it. Your opponent rolls another D6 and adds

Satyr
Enemy
Sense of Direction
Advantage
Magical Barrier
You must win 3 Tests (not necessarily in a row) to penetrate the Barrier. You may keep testing each Day until you lose a Test. Discard this Wayley when it's defeated.
Spidereye Goblin
The Spidereye Goblins are known to crawl the cliff-faces and undercaverns of the Darkreach Mountains.
A Spidereye Clan Goblin throws a net over you from above, then jumps to attack you. Pass a Might Test of 5 to break free of the net before the attack or suffer -2 to your Combat Test with the Goblin. Discard this Wayley when it's defeated.


Lost!
You've lost your way. The difficulty of this Wayley depends on the League in which you become lost. Use the highest difficulty that applies to your League. Discard this Wayley when it's defeated.
◆ Resolve 1 in Forest, Ruins, or Town
◆ Resolve 2 in Border, Marsh, Mountains, or Ocean
◆ Resolve 3 in a Cave
Somewhere
Down
Here
There
Peace Mission
Quest

yld Hunt

it to the test's rating. The higher number wins. It's as simple as that.

One scenario, or quest, comes in each Story Pack. The object of the game is to complete your own quest before your opponents achieve theirs, and it's refreshing that the quests are not about killing things. As in faerie stories, guile and determination are just as important as physical might. Each quest is also numbered as part of an ongoing campaign. Collect the lot and you can play through the entire adventure.

League cards represent the land of Arcadia. These are similar to the playing area in *Mystic Wood* and *Sorceror's Cave*, but are a much more practical size. *Arcadia* can be played on a normal coffee table whereas you needed a whole floor for the other two! Each League is suitably named – Stormguard Keep, Splendour Lake, Darkreach Spires etc – and has flavour text and specific rules about what characters can do there. The League cards' artwork lets the game down slightly, being only marginally better than the equivalent in *Spellfire*. This really is a shame, because the rest of the illustrations are absolutely superb.

Arcadia's main problem is that the rules (which come on just four cards) only begin to cover various eventualities. Added to that, some of the Quests and Waylays are poorly worded, ambiguous or contradictory. White Wolf intends to bring out an *Arcadia Strategy Guide* by September which should answer these questions but, until that reaches the shops, players will have to search for FAQ lists on White Wolf's World Wide Web page, or come to amicable rules decisions amongst themselves.

One of the interesting things about *Arcadia* is that it's possible to play 'campaign' games, where characters earn experience for completing Quests and can use it to buy extra Merits for later games.

Arcadia is White Wolf's second CCG. The first, *Rage*, is based on the *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* roleplaying game, and is a fast, brutal game of combat between werewolf packs.

And the players said...

RICH: "The rules are not very well written and you rarely get the right mix of cards in just one Character Pack and Story Pack. It would have been better as a boxed game."

GARY: "The background appeals to me more than that of *Changeling*. It captures the faerie tale atmosphere much better."

CAROL: "It certainly makes a change from *Talisman*."

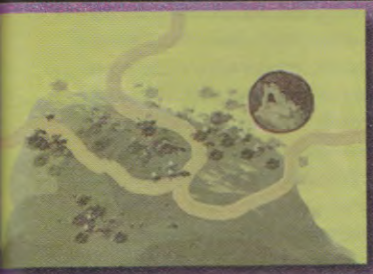
Arcadia is quite enjoyable to play as a fun, social game, and should appeal to the same kind of people who like *Mystic Wood, Dungeon* and *Talisman*. Nevertheless, it does fall down in exactly the same areas as those games. Board and card games are about strategic play and winning, whereas roleplaying is more about character interaction than a simple race to achieve objectives. It is difficult to balance the two. *Arcadia's* Quests are rated according to how tough they are, but even so games can be unbalanced. Likewise, the roleplaying potential is compromised when character interaction is limited by strict rules.

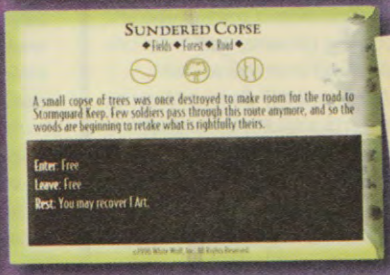
Nevertheless, *Arcadia's* designers have come close to accomplishing the quest for the elusive RPG/card or board game hybrid. It manages to get across the right high fantasy feel, introduces a world that invites exploration, has a sense of ongoing plot and even gets across the idea that roleplaying isn't just about killing things.

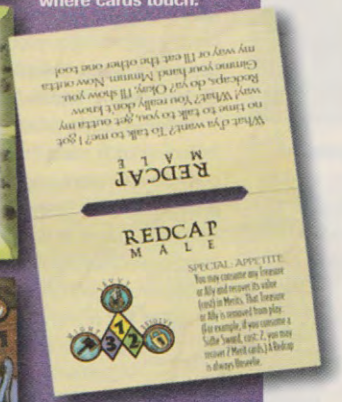
Lucya Szachnowski

Score 6/10

A world of adventure...




Sundered Copse
◆Fields◆Forest◆Road◆
A small copse of trees was once destroyed to make room for the road to Stormguard Keep. Few soldiers pass through this route anymore, and so the woods are beginning to retake what is rightfully theirs.
Enter: Free
Leave: Free
Rest: You may recover 1 Art.



For every Quest you have to select five Leagues. You and your opponent take it in turns to place these to make up the board. At least one terrain feature (roads, forests etc.) must match where cards touch.

Your Merit cards are placed in front of you and your Flaws are given to your opponent and placed in front of her.

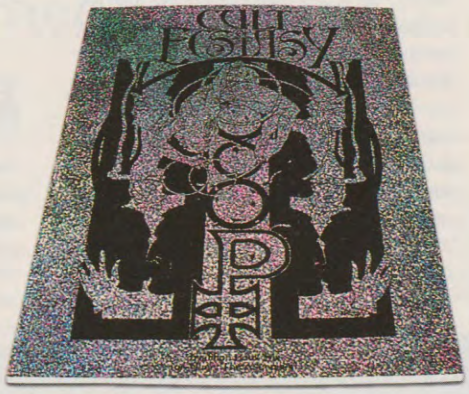
Cult of Ecstasy

Tradition Book

A sourcebook for *Mage: The Ascension* £5.99 White Wolf

001 404 292 1819 Out now

The magick of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll.



When something is described as 'adult', it can mean one of two things these days. Most commonly it means the sordid side of life: violence, gore and pornographic, exploitative sex. However, occasionally it can mean that it addresses, in a mature way, issues that concern those now through the agonies of puberty. The *Cult of Ecstasy Tradition Book* falls into the second category, more or less.

The Cult of Ecstasy is a group of mages who find their inspiration for Magick in sensuality and sensation of all forms. The beginning of the second chapter of the book has a mage reaching orgasm simply through the sensations of a rough floor under her feet. From there on in the book is liberally scattered with sex, drug use, sado-masochistic practices and loud music.

This is all good, controversial stuff, but it is going to offend some people. Use of hard drugs and promiscuity is never explicitly condemned, although the book is peppered with warnings that it is merely a work of fiction, and that many of the practices found within are extremely dangerous. But for the less prudish, the book successfully conveys the lifestyle of a group who can carry sensation way beyond anything we can hope to experience.

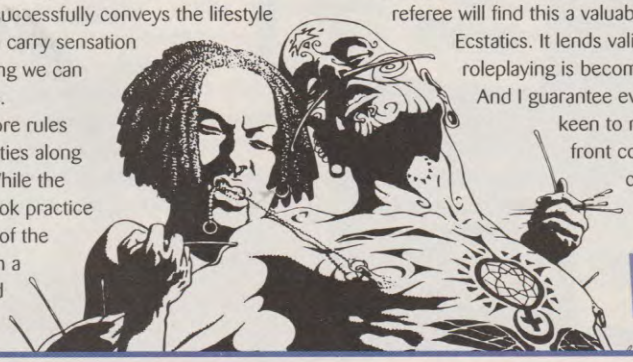
It doesn't ignore rules and game practicalities along the way, though. While the normal tradition book practice of conveying most of the information through a narrative is adhered to, the author has added many of the game implications in separate boxes scattered throughout the book. This makes *Cult of Ecstasy* much more useful than many similar White Wolf products, without sacrificing the customary high readability we've become accustomed to.

The final chapter of the book drops the narrative to give sample Ecstatic characters templates, including a Prince of Pain, the illustration for which is one of the nastiest I've seen in a while. Also included are a few notable cultists from the past, including Rasputin the Mad Monk, Jim Morrison and Aleister Crowley (who is rapidly becoming a roleplaying favourite, also appearing in the *Call of Cthulhu* sourcebook, *The Golden Dawn,* reviewed in **arcane** 8).

An appendix presents rules for Ecstatic Magick, including such gems as a rote for making hash considerably more potent. Another allows the mage to prolong 'pleasure' (ahem) almost indefinitely.

The sum of these parts is to create a much wider, deeper and more interesting picture of the Cult of Ecstasy tradition – the aim of the book. Any player or referee will find this a valuable guide to playing Ecstatics. It lends validity to the claim that roleplaying is becoming a mature hobby. And I guarantee everyone will be very keen to read it from its glittery front cover to its glittery back cover. Can't think why…

Adam Tinworth



Score 8/10

Spellfire 4th Edition

A collectable card game

£6.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

In its striking red and black double-pack, *Spellfire's* 4th edition has the instant eye appeal that none of its predecessors could muster. With this latest set, I would say that it's almost dead to rights. I say 'almost' because TSR has unfortunately wasted a good opportunity to lose the poor and cutaway artwork on some of the earlier cards.

The 520 *4th Edition* cards are taken from every expansion and mainline set, augmented by over 200 new designs. Cards missed from re-evaluation during the 3rd edition shake-up have been re-vitalised here to ensure that this becomes the best way yet to start playing *Spellfire.*

The twin-deck pack is a little misleading, because you don't get the usual two 55-card decks and a set of rules. Instead, you find in the red box a 55-card deck playable directly from the packet, and in the black box, along with a set of revised rules, you discover a booster pack of 12 *Draconomicon* cards, the latest additional expansion (reviewed in last month's issue). The selection of cards has been fairly well conceived – it includes many of the more powerful and imaginative cards along with the usual basics.

Sometimes rules are changed because they don't work or are too complicated, other times rules are changed just for the sake of it. Collectable card game rules seem to change to force players into using cards they otherwise wouldn't touch, and the *Spellfire 4th Edition* rules fall into several of the above-stated categories.

Spellfire will never seriously rival *Magic,* but it does provide light, sometimes intense entertainment at a reasonable price, and when you come down to it, that is surely the essence of games playing.

Chris Baylis Score 6/10

Kult Player's Companion

A supplement for *Kult*

£10.99 Target Games/Metropolis

Out now

Unlike Player's Guides for some horror systems, which manage to give away vital background secrets and often contain material more useful for refs than players, the *Kult Player's Companion* is exactly what its name says. It contains material which

clarifies the character creation process together with new archetypes, advantages, disadvantages, dark secrets, skills and plenty of advice on how to get the very best out of your character.

Although it doesn't give away *Kult's* background secrets, it does have a number of gruesome and macabre short stories which exemplify the game's themes and atmosphere. The book's design is a bit different from earlier *Kult* supplements, with a lot more interior illustrations and a brown front cover showing a disturbing, blood-smeared collage.

The new skills range from versatile things such as 'city/area secrets' to more specialised or obscure areas of knowledge such as 'agronomy' and 'erotica'. The new archetypes are varied – asylum escapee, homemaker and fugitive to name three – but are not enough to sell the supplement on their own. What is likely to make players buy the book are new rules for using Children of the Night as player characters and expanded martial arts rules. Children of the Night in *Kult* are more like Clive Barker's Nightbreed than White Wolf vampires; the chance to use them as PCs is an excellent addition to the game. The martial arts section, however, seems a little over the top. If you care that much about your character's fighting manoeuvres, shouldn't you be playing *Street Fighter*?

Lucya Szachnowski **Score 7/10**

The Jedi Academy Sourcebook

A sourcebook for *Star Wars*

£15 West End Games

001 717 253 6990 Out now

In this sourcebook, Kevin Anderson's trilogy of post-movie *Star Wars* yarns gets the RPG treatment. Luke Skywalker has taken 12 students back to Yavin IV to teach them to be Jedi Knights. But a dark Jedi, last of the Sith, is hiding on Yavin, and he intends to convert Luke's pupils to the Dark Side of the Force. Meanwhile, Han and Chewie have gone to Kessel, been captured by an old foe, and discovered that a group ex-imperial scientists have got a working prototype of the Death Star secretly stored away at a hidden base in a complex of black holes. Not to mention attempts to poison Mon Motha with nano-viruses and kidnap young Anakin Solo. It's all go when you're a rebel!

So, where do the player characters fit into all this? Good question. Damned if I know the answer. This sourcebook →

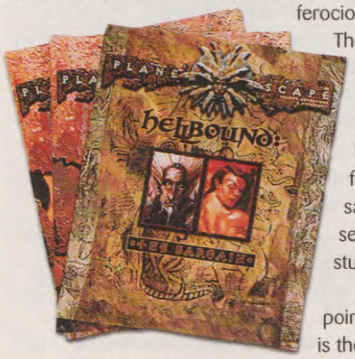
Hellbound: The Blood War

A boxed-set for *AD&D Planescape* £15.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Not so much a war as a way of life — or death!

A war has raged across the planes since the dawn of time. Fought with unparalleled savagery between two of the most powerful races of the multiverse, the baatezu and tanar'ri, it has cost billions of lives. And although this Blood War is fought on the Lower Planes between the forces of evil, the fate of all the planes hangs on its outcome.

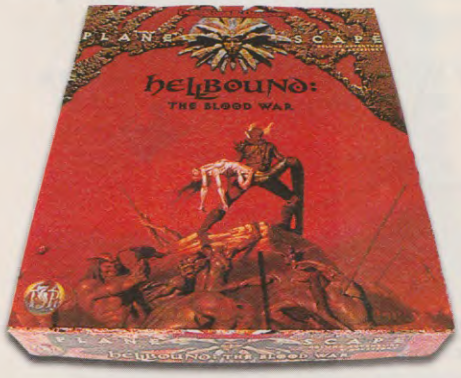
Hellbound: The Blood War – a *Deluxe Adventure & Accessory* – claims to lay bare the dark of this most ferocious of feuds.



The 'secrets' it delivers are in fact a little disappointing, but it does flesh out a savage game setting in stunning detail.

The focal point of *Hellbound* is the 80-page Dark of the Blood War, which details the nature of the fiends, the history of the war, the magic, the ranks and strategies. This is superb stuff, fact-packed, well written and full of character.

'War Games' provides three adventures for the seriously suicidal. These hurl *Planescape* players headlong into the middle of a (now) lively and vicious Blood War. This is not a very clever place for the unprepared or inexperienced, so only the very able need apply – unless you like rolling up new characters! These three well-balanced adventures play to the different strengths of the Blood War. Players get to see the aftermath, meet the generals and mix with the blade-fodder at first hand. And while bargaining with, fighting and double-crossing Pit Fiends and Balors is hazardous, the roleplay buzz of doing so makes it almost worth the gamble.



The Chant of the Blood War gives players the necessary background information for a *Blood War* bash. Contradictory, confusing and packing just enough clues to whet the appetite, the Chant works. After reading it any character worth their swagger will realise the risk of getting embroiled in the Blood War, but think that they've got the measure of it. They haven't – nobody could have – but as a DM you're going to have a hoot pitching major-league fiends and monumental plots at them.

The *Planescape* series has been noted for its attention to detail, with manuals written in a coherent style, all of which is backed up with brilliantly bizarre artwork. *Hellbound* hammers home this advantage with 'Visions of War', a separate book of adventure-related pics the DM can show to players at crucial points of the game. Furthermore, there's a nifty 16-page full-colour comic book which encapsulates the peculiar nature of the *Planescape* multiverse. These extras don't add that much to the game, but they'll help DMs get a grasp on the world they're running.

Hellbound doesn't quite delve deep enough into the background of the Blood War to be a classic. It does, however, bring this battle to life. A huge work with three excellent supporting adventures, this is an absolute must for all *Planescape* DMs. So, *Planescape* players had better start praying – life's about to get very bloody and cheap, extremely quickly!

Trenton Webb

Score 8/10

I, Tyrant & Eye of Pain

A sourcebook and adventure for *AD&D*

***I, Tyrant* £10.99** **Eye of Pain £4.99**

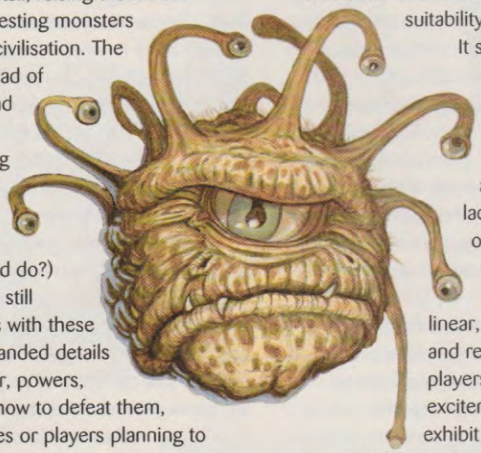
TSR 01223 212517 **Out now**

11 eyes, paranoid, xenophobic, having a taste for live animals and being deadly with magic. okay, who's first?

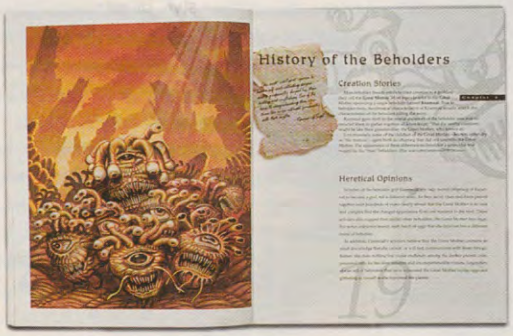
I, Tyrant and *Eye of Pain* mark the first volumes in the new *Monstrous Arcana* series from TSR, focusing on the most popular monsters in the *AD&D* game. The first to receive this royal treatment is the frequently overlooked beholder.

I, Tyrant expands on the information given primarily in the *Monstrous Manual* through details of the race's history, religion, culture, settlements and psychology, as well as statistics on further true beholder deviants. As if these multi-eyed nightmares weren't deadly enough, now they can have magical items and psionics too.

Through this booklet the amazing versatility of the race is depicted in great detail, raising them from merely a collection of interesting monsters to a curious and powerful civilisation. The result gives referees a myriad of encounter opportunities and possibilities for inserting beholder NPCs into existing campaigns for that extra pinch of spice. (Why have a 'normal' ruler of a guild when a beholder exile could do?) The *Monstrous Manual* will still suffice for brief encounters with these creatures, but through expanded details on the creatures' behaviour, powers, driving forces and tips on how to defeat them, *I, Tyrant* is useful to referees or players planning to embark upon a beholder-heavy adventure.



I, Tyrant 8/10



Eye of Pain is a different story altogether. This is the first installment of a three-part adventure, which throws adventurers into the designs of an elder orb as it schemes to overthrow a hive mother and claim control of its city. The players are hired by the disguised beholder for a scenario which is designed to test their suitability for its plans.

It starts promisingly enough with a pair of well-crafted maps on the inside front cover displaying a beholders lair, its location and a small community nearby. The adventure itself, however, is lacklustre and unfortunately screams of being rushed to coincide with the release of *I, Tyrant*.

The adventure is extremely linear, lacking any semblance of urgency, and relies on powerful monsters to test players and form some sort of excitement. The suggested encounters exhibit little more thought – all have tenuous links and are never developed. (The arrival of a rival adventure group and a barely seen mysterious guild member looking for a missing comrade are good ideas, but are never realised and hardly intrude upon the players' actions).

To exemplify the poor quality of the finish, a narrative is left with its concluding sentence trailing away to be guessed at. Later, a mysterious bust found in a woodland clearing is described as having a beard and moustache – then, on the opposite page, a clean shaven sculpted head is shown!

Good idea, but badly executed. Let's hope the others in the trilogy get better.

David Cornford

Eye of Pain 3/10

→ certainly doesn't tell me. Sure, one can imagine scenarios in which the description of Kessel (as in 'we'll be sent to the spice mines of') would come in useful. But under what circumstances would any referee need a floorplan of the sea pod on Mon Calamari to which Admiral Ackbar temporarily retires? When is the prototype Death Star going to feature in my campaign, given that it was last seen falling into a black hole? Sure, you also get the obligatory descriptions of major characters, new spaceships, weapons, robots and monsters. But adventure seeds? Scenarios? Advice for the referee? Sections headed 'Ideas for campaigns set in the Jedi Academy Universe? Not a galactic sausage.

This is well drawn, well written and well thought-out. But I cannot imagine what any roleplayer is going to do with it.

Andrew Rilstone **Score 3/10**

Sailing on the Seas of Fate

A supplement for *Elric!*

£8.95 **Chaosium**

001 510 547 7681 **Out now**

Given the abundant recourse to sailing upon the infamous Seas of Fate to which Morcock's characters seem prone, it is perhaps surprising that it's taken this long for a supplement dedicated to nautical adventure to appear for use with the *Elric!* system. For it would surely be a rare group of *Elric!* characters who would not see that seafaring has its benefits in terms of getting around the hazardous Young Kingdoms.

And thus we have what many of us have been seeking for some time now – full rules for nautical exploration and combat, combined with illustrative material detailing the many ports scattered throughout the Kingdoms. There's also a selection of sample vessels for our characters to inhabit during their voyages, and a couple of scenarios which not only bring to life some of the situations encountered within Morcock's novels, but which are sure to test all but the most able group of PCs.

The centrepiece of this 80-page booklet is a scenario called The Curse of the Whisperer, which, though neatly crafted, is a little too linear for my liking. Still, its evocative of the desired atmosphere, and any scenario with a ghost ship in it has got to be fun to referee.

This is a worthy addition to any *Elric!* ref's library of supplements. Yes, it's a little dry in places, but the rules additions are

clearly presented, and the flavour of sailing upon the seas surrounding the Young Kingdoms is captured well.

Paul Pettengale **Score 7/10**

Death Unchained

A scenario for *AD&D Ravenloft*

$7.99 TSR

01223 212517 Out now

To be worth the cash, off-the-shelf scenarios should fulfill two principle functions: provide players with slick, spectacular action and save DMs some serious design donkey-work. However, to be great such adventures must also show off the strengths of the game setting, illustrate exactly how that world was designed to work and add to the mysterious legend of the lands. And without a shadow of doubt TSR's *Death Unchained* is a great off-the-shelf *AD&D Ravenloft* scenario.

Set in the merciless regime of Flakovnia, *Death Unchained* has plenty of Hammer-horror atmosphere, but this time it's more akin to the paranoid fears of *Witchfinder General* than the schlock of *Frankenstein*. This hard core horror-fest sets a horde of dark and sinister assassins off in hot pursuit of players the very moment they step out of the mists – and doesn't let up.

For the players, *Death Unchained* is a non-stop chase through grim city streets and a beautifully labyrinthine dungeon complex. For DMs it's a well-balanced adventure guide – it's strict enough to maintain direction but with enough flexibility and troubleshooting options to be useful under game conditions.

Death Unchained's insight comes, somewhat curiously, from its more mainstream feel. Many *Ravenloft* scenarios have a late-Georgian atmosphere in which demi-humans and magic feel a tad anachronistic. However, this adventure revels in a far more medieval flavour, essentially being set in downtown Transylvania at the time of Vlad Tepes.

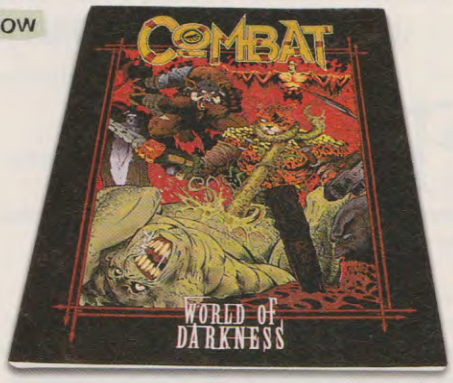
Pushed along at a frantic pace, filled with plenty of clues which are clear enough for players to find and follow, and with a varied cast of refreshingly different villains, *Death Unchained* opens a promising trilogy. What's more, with its mainstream feel it's ideal for other world parties to test the murky waters of *Ravenloft*. However, if this is your first foray into the Demiplane of Dread, be warned – it's a real character killer.

Trenton Webb **Score 9/10**

World of Darkness Combat

A supplement for the *World of Darkness* roleplaying games £8.99

White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 Out now



A plethora of ways to do maximum damage...

As the title suggests, this is simple, no-nonsense, bone-crunching stuff. It's 100 pages are packed with ways to hurt people, all graphically illustrated – if you've ever wanted to see a vampire get her ears popped, turn to page 27 and enjoy.

'Fight!' introduces the idea of combat manoeuvres, purchased using Power Points derived from a character's abilities. So, for every dot in Brawl, a character gets 2 Power Points to spend on Brawl-based manoeuvres. To help a player keep track of all this information, you can keep a Combat Card for each manoeuvre.

'Combat/Weapon Manoeuvres' describes 100 manoeuvres, each one listing prerequisites, cost in Power Points and modifiers to initiative, accuracy, damage and movement. Some are clearly distinct in effect, others differ only in window dressing, but this can be fun for the sadists amongst us. Some are tough – Neckbreaker is just as nasty as it sounds. There are notes on how to combine manoeuvres (just in case anyone's still standing) and on how to create your own.

'Styles' outlines about 30 fighting styles and the combat manoeuvres taught under them. These include standards such as boxing, karate and kung-fu as well as martial arts designed by lupine characters, vampires and mages. 'The Supernatural' offers tips on how to use abilities, skills and supernatural powers in combat, which can be integrated with very little work.

The Appendices include new hit locations, which make combat more realistic and gruesome, sample characters and Weapons/Firearms Techniques. Each weapon is placed in a technique group (swords, for example) and players can choose two groups for each point of mêlée. Finish your players off with the obligatory new weapons and guns, as well as some pretty lethal ammo – incendiary shotgun shells will keep you amused for hours.

The Storyteller combat system has always been flawed and involves rolling handfuls of dice, often to little or no effect. This supplement makes no attempt to correct the basic flaws and the rules here are additional, making combat even longer and more complicated. It also involves an horrendous amount of work on the part of the Storyteller. Each sample character has 20 or 30 manoeuvres – imagine working these out for each NPC. Also bear in mind that these rules are optional and that White wolf will not be incorporating them into future releases.

Several body blows against, then. So what has this bruiser got in its favour? The new rules are clearly explained, allowing almost any combat style or move to be incorporated. The biggest payoff is that it opens up your options, giving combat more flavour and characters more style. Whether it's useful is down to how important combat is in your campaign, and whether you think the new options are really worth this much work.

Mark Barter

Score 5/10

Defilers and Preservers: The Wizards of Athas

A sourcebook for *Dark Sun* £9.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Just when you thought it couldn't get any better, TSR shows that life begins at 21...

From the first to the revised edition, the *Dark Sun* campaign setting has seen fundamental changes. One such incident was the death of the feared Dragon, and the knowledge that the remaining sorcerer kings were slowly but surely transforming into beasts.

Defilers and Preservers takes this one step further and offers all defilers the chance for such power, together with details of a like path for preserver characters. This 96-page volume is a complete wizards handbook for *Dark Sun* players and referees. Included within is a comprehensive listing of every spell available to the wizards of Athas – drawn from the *Player's Handbook, The Complete Wizards Handbook,* the

Tome of Magic and the revised edition rules. Details on new magical sources to draw from and expanded guidelines on the actual drain of magical energy are also included in the sourcebook.

Many tables and charts are reproduced from *The Age of Heroes,* but these combine with the new procedures to create a complete magical tome to refer to, instead of the constant scrabbling between countless books that normally results in an *AD&D* game. The real value of the book, however, is in the new material. The 13 new character kits included for the wizard class greatly expands the gaming potential for magic users, ranging from arena mages to chasseurs who hunt those similarly gifted, and from the free wizards of Tyr to shadow wizards who draw from a new source of energy – a realm of chill darkness known only as The Black.

Veteran characters receive new challenges too, because full rules are detailed for the transformation of 20th level wizards to 21st level dragons or their good-aligned counterparts, avangions who each wield psionics as deadly as their outlawed magical abilities. However, the road to such power is fraught with danger – as usual – and to reach the final stage as a 30th level advanced being requires all of the experience and ability that the character and player have accumulated.

13 new proficiencies and 61 new spells add to this rebirth of the magical ways on Athas, including 10th level reality-altering psionic enchantments ranging from fatal walls of ash to magical prolific forestation. Quite simply, *Defilers and Preservers* is essential for anyone planning to run or play wizards in the *Dark Sun* setting. The new and expanded rules and details are not just merely useful, but flesh out the lives, abilities and skills of the arcane scholars.

The artwork is mostly of a good, sketch-like quality and complements the text, which has a well-indexed layout and is easily followed.

David Cornford

Score 9/10

Death Ascendant

A scenario for *AD&D Ravenloft*

£7.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Ravenloft's secret societies are like buses – you spend ages trying to catch one and when you do, another appears right behind it. This 'wheels within wheels' premise is what links *Death Unchained* (Episode 1) – see page 73 – with *Death Ascendant* (Episode 2) in the *Grim Harvest* trilogy.

Ascendant is set in one of the less civilised areas of Ravenloft, the realm of Darkon. The trail has led the characters into Nartok, a place where public impaling and child-branding are the latest fad. The players discover that behind this squalid facade, Nartok is being torn apart by a secret war between two sets of spies.

Using the fortune-telling Vistani Tarroka, the players are warned of their goal. Rumours of war and a new flavour of zombie then drive them towards their target location. And once there, the player's are left alone to resolve Nartok's current crisis – with violence, natch.

Death Ascendant could work as a stand-alone feature, but this would be a waste. The continuity of plot makes *Ascendant* far more satisfying as a sequel.

With a vast abbey as the central location and a less convincing climax than *Unchained,* players need to bring recent histories to bear in order to get the most out of *Ascendant.* If they've fought their way through the first installment they won't care about the slightly silly resolution.

An excellent sequel, *Ascendant* perfectly continues the events set in motion in *Unchained.* But they do need to be played in sequence if the full effect of this series is to be enjoyed.

Trenton Webb Score 8/10

Slag! 2nd Edition

A tactical starship combat game £4.95

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Attempting to pack a complete starship combat and design system into 28 pages might seem futile, but *Slag!* not only manages to fit into this space, but it's also a fun game to play.

The system is based around the individual systems that make up a starship, such as weapons, drives, sensors and so on. The number of systems a ship has determines its size, which combined with its tech level determines its point cost and a number of other game statistics.

Designing a ship is a matter of filling in the blanks on a ship plan, with each square representing a system. The position of the system on the plan represents where it is, so drives go at the back, weapons, defences and sensors on the front and sides, and control systems in the middle.

Once the ships are designed or chosen, the fighting begins. The game can be played on a hex grid or even on a chess board, and a sheet of stickers is provided to make counters with. Combat proceeds in turns, split into movement and firing phases. No dice are used to resolve hits – the statistics of the ships are used to determine damage, which is then applied to the target's systems on its plan.

Slag! is hardly likely to revolutionise table-top wargaming, but that's not its intention. It sets out to be a fast, simple and fun game of spaceship combat, and in that regard it's a complete success.

Andy Butcher **Score 7/10**

Volo's Guide to the Dalelands

A sourcebook for *AD&D Forgotten Realms*
£9.50 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

The first line in Volo's latest guide should be enough to condemn it. "Clippety-cloppety, bold Jonstan the Rover rides misty-eyed down to the dales again." You can't judge a book by its doggerel though, because, like its dreadful cover, these are functional trappings rather than an honest indication of content.

This fifth installment of Volo's guide to the *Forgotten Realms* details one of the more scenic areas of the Faerun. Initially, the Dalelands seem too settled to be worth bothering with. But this is an illusion – there's intrigue afoot, monsters in the mountains and war around the corner.

As a sort of magically empowered Magenta DeVine, Volo takes us from Daggerdale in the North through to the High Dale in the South. It's not always a thrilling trip, but it's effective at highlighting the sinister via Volo's rating system – five pipes or tankards means a top tavern, five coins high prices and five daggers a distinctly dangerous place to hang out.

Locations and characters can be dropped into most campaigns or used as foundations on which proper Daleland scenarios can be built. In revealing its low-level secrets the guide alludes to darker riddles, the effect of which is to pique the interest of the reader in the Dalelands.

Trenton Webb **Score 6/10**

Book of Storyteller Secrets

A sourcebook for *Vampire: The Dark Ages* £6.99 White Wolf

001 404 292 1819 Out now

Take a bite out of the Dark Ages.

The title is misleading because this is less a book of secrets and more a primer to the Dark Ages. The 'Geography and History' section offers an overview of Europe and the Moslem kingdoms surrounding the Mediterranean. It's a rather cursory overview, with most countries given less than a page and Wales summed up in three

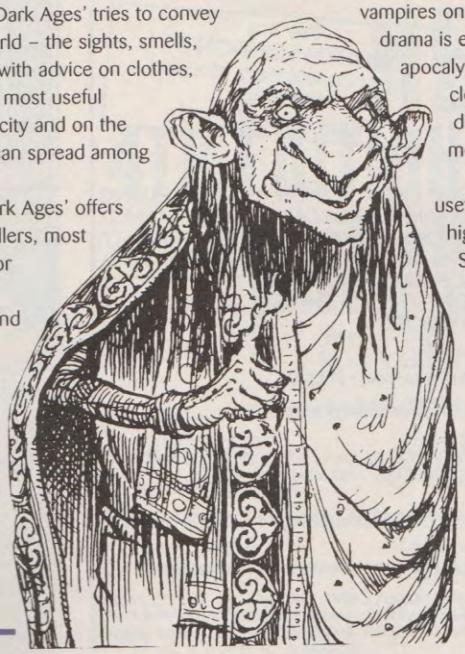
paragraphs (more than enough, some might say). Details are given of the history and politics of both the mortal and the Kindred population, with brief mentions of local faerie and lupine communities.

'Life and Death in the Dark Ages' tries to convey a flavour of the medieval world – the sights, smells, sounds, taste and texture – with advice on clothes, food, names and travel. The most useful sections are on designing a city and on the fun diseases that vampires can spread among the local populace.

'Storytelling for the Dark Ages' offers a number of tips for Storytellers, most of which are just as useful for modern campaigns. This is intelligent, thoughtful stuff and covers all the important topics including goals, contingency plans, group unity and the radical concept of talking to the players. One of the topics discussed is reality versus fantasy – the tone of the section is intended to be broadly realistic, but some fantastical elements are included for those roleplayers who want them.

'Friends, Enemies and Miscellany' is most notable for a detailed section on ghouls and how the different clans use them, with expanded rules for the gargoyle servants of the Tremere, as introduced in the 'Storyteller's Guide'. This is rounded off with a few legendary creatures and magic items including Tzimisce war ghouls and Kindred 'holy' relics. In the back of the sourcebook there is a full-colour map of Europe and the various surrounding lands.

Ironically, the tone of the book isn't dark enough. The medieval ages were a time of blood and death, of human misery and ignorance on a grand scale. With vampires on top, the scope for carnage and drama is enormous, and I expected an apocalyptic tone which just isn't here. The closest it comes is the section on diseases, and I would have enjoyed more of this black humour.



This book is full of good ideas and useful hints with adventure hooks highlighted in boxed text. The Storyteller tips and the guide to designing a city are excellent. My main reservation is that although it touches on most of the key issues, it only skims the surface. There's a lot here to inspire the Storyteller, but not enough to run a campaign. It's good as far as it goes, but lacks depth.

Mark Barter

Score 7/10

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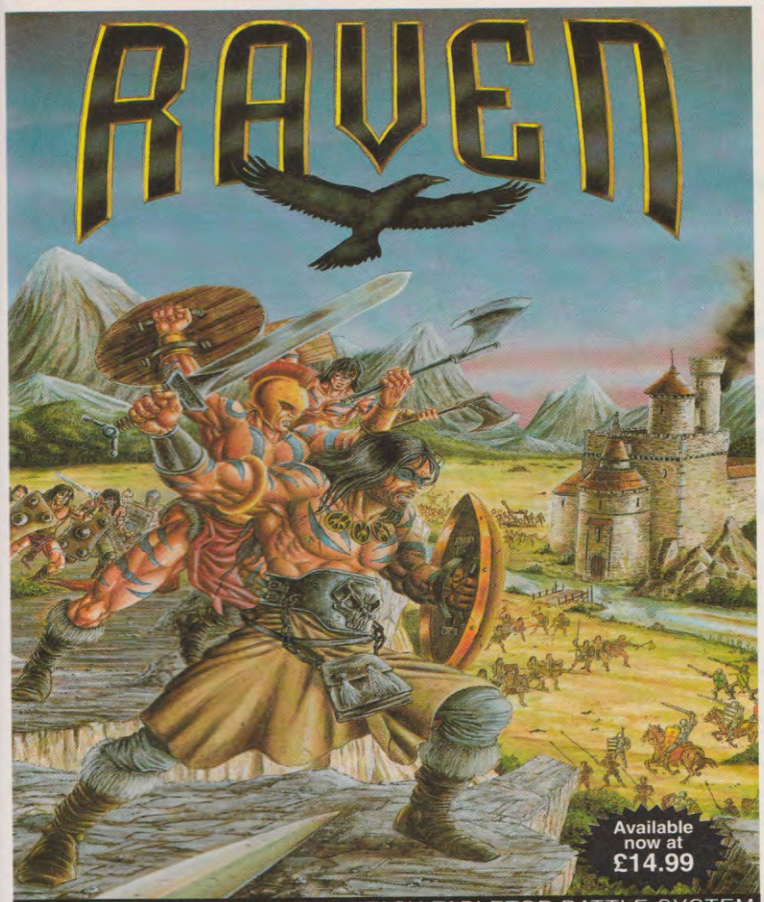

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The Knights of the Black Earth: Volume II

by Margaret Weis and Don Perrin

Published by Victor Gollancz Hardback £15.99

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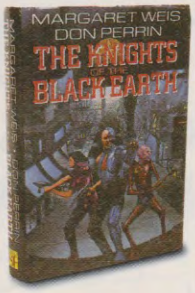


Xris (pronounced Chris), is rightly pretty pissed off. His long-standing friend, one Dalin Rowan, got into severe money troubles and sold federal secrets to a malicious alien race, which ended up with Xris and another colleague being caught in an ambush. This left Xris without the best part of a body and the other stone cold dead. After being kitted out with a cyborg bod', Xris is after revenge...

This, the second installment in the pacey *Knights of the Black Earth* series from fantasy guru Margaret Weis (of *Dragonlance* fame), and her buddy Don Perrin, continues the plot – Xris has

"The emotional, irrational, damnly romantic part of himself wanted very much to believe that Captain Tess Stauss was on his side."

tracked down his ex-pal (who, incidentally, has had a complete sex change in order to evade discovery), and has organised his motley crew of mercenaries to finish him/her off. Unfortunately, as was played out in the first book, it's not that simple – there is a group of fanatics called the Knights of the Black Earth who want to foil his plans to their own nefarious ends.

This is a totally full-on experience – relentless in pace, and never short of action. The plot wanders between a wry cleverness and complete incredulity, but that hardly matters – this is a schlock sci-fi flick laid down on paper, and it's milked for all it's worth.

The occasionally decent writing and the many cliff-hangers keep you reading, even though you know that the ending is predictable (which it isn't) and the characters cardboard cutouts at best. If you indulge, expect to be entertained, though rarely impressed. Paul Pettengale

Score 6/10

Synthesis & Other Virtual Realities

by Mary Rosenblum Published by Arkham House

Hardback £16.50 Out now

Much science fiction seems to push science itself in the direction we think we want to go – into space, towards a society where technology can make our lives easier, towards an exciting world, even an ideal world – but we will never achieve any kind of future unless we deal with today first. Some writers do see fear in the future, though – fear of huge corporations, of natural disaster, of threats from outer space. But is this the right kind of fear?

Mary Rosenblum sees things differently. For her, tomorrow is like today, only worse – the world is drying up, water is towed from the Antarctic to America and sold there, information is freely available (at a price), the shanty towns are cities, the rich are rich indeed, but the whole of the world is a Third World.

"In the grey light the neighbourhood looked pale and colourless, as if all life had drained away during the night" (from *Entrada*)

Rosenblum deals with these themes in her stories with aggression and sureness, but she does not need far-fetched fantasy. No – these issues are simply the reality in which her characters live and not just gimmicks, hooks to hang something on. We meet the boy from the Dry with a special gift – but it can create no water; we meet the virtual artist whose gift comes second to the fate of his father's company; we meet the house servant who can only find escape if she becomes like her employer whom she despises. There are no laser guns in these tales, only bleak possibilities which should cause us to think.

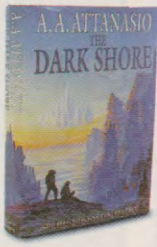
Eerie, melancholy and convincing, it's hard to say exactly when this collection of short stories is set, but it's sometime near. Too near. But if more science fiction was written in this way, maybe we wouldn't be sliding towards this sad world that Rosenblum so beautifully describes.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 8/10

The Dark Shore

by A A Attanasio Published by Hodder & Stoughton

Hardback £16.99 Out now



In which the Dark Lord (sic) returns to Irth (sic) with a bunch of cacodemons (nasty reptilian creatures) and tries to take over the

world. I might add that he tried this once before and was promptly banished to the Gulf for his pains. This being a fantasy epic-type novel, there are no prizes for guessing that he's sent packing for the second time in his career.

"He lay back and lifted his engorgement with one hand. 'The greater revenge is not Drev's suffering but my pleasure. Come, straddle me.'"

It would be refreshing, wouldn't it, if for once a Dark Lord came along who not only crushed and enslaved the locals, but made sure they stayed crushed and enslaved. No wonder William Hill has stopped taking bets on Dark Lords winding up on the losing side; give anyone a cloak and a few slaves and they start foolishly underestimating their enemies. It's a mug's game backing the baddies, but at least this one dishes out some admirably sick and depraved suffering before receiving the traditional hiding.

The only thing that sets this pantomime-style hokum apart from its predecessors is a single passage that will stick in my mind for a while. It concerns this mage – one of the few who doesn't switch sides after a single glance at a cacodemon. No, this mage has accumulated so much Charm (magic, basically) that he has a chance to escape the material world and be at one with Creation. Just as he's about to pop off, as it were, he is able to see the past, present and future, all at once. He looks at this ancient building. Within, he can see the plain on which it was built, its foundations, its scaffolding, and the rubble it will become. It's very well done.

The mage doesn't go off and be at one with the universe, though, he goes off to fight the Dark Lord instead. Naturally.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 4/10

The Queen's Captive

by Haydn Middleton Published by Little, Brown
Hardback £15.99 Out now

Now, *The King's Evil* was sexually explicit, but the second part of this Arthurian Cycle contains material I really can't bring myself to describe in these pages.

I would, if only in the interests of your elucidation, but Paul would edit it out straight away and then give me funny looks for the rest of the month. So, suffice to say that, once again, I am astonished by this country's double standards concerning material 'tending to corrupt and deprave'. If you made a film of this book you might end up in prison.

There seems to be a competition in literary circles as to who can be the most distasteful, yet despite graphic descriptions of necrophilia, this isn't sick pornography but a confidently slow-moving story of love and loneliness. If you want goodly knights wenching and feasting at banquets before riding out in Albion to vanquish their foe in screaming orgies of bloodletting, then look elsewhere. That's not to say the story is delicate or over-sensitive, it's often depressive and much of the time it's

"'I know what you are to him,' she had said. 'I'm his sister,' Morgan had gasped. 'His sister,' Guenever had agreed. 'His... sister.' And in those two neutral words she had somehow encompassed the entire enormity of it."

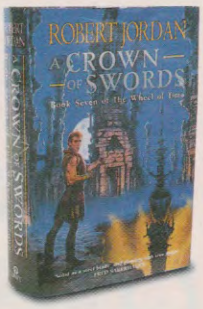
downright brashly cruel and extremely rude, but Haydn Middleton has created a read for when you're sitting in your hammock as the sun's going down.

Unsurprisingly, there's God and the Beast – surprisingly, there's rather more God than Beast; the author uses imagery heavily laden with Christianity. But, what's most surprising in these days of never-ending sagas, the plots of which remain deliberately open-ended so as to milk sales for as long as possible, is that *The Knight's Vengeance*, due out this time next year, will be the final part of *The Mordred Cycle*. And I haven't got a clue what's going to happen next.

Jonathan Palmer Score 7/10

A Crown of Swords

by Robert Jordan Published by Orbit
Hardback £17.99 Out now



The seventh book in Jordan's monumental *Wheel of Time* series, *A Crown of Swords* continues the story of Rand al'Thor, the Dragon Reborn, a man who will either save the world or break it. The *Wheel of Time* series has followed the adventures of Rand, his friends and his enemies from his beginnings as a simple farmer's son, and is one of the most absorbing and ambitious works of fantasy ever. Jordan is a good writer, able to weave together a wide variety of plots and characters into an impressive tale which touches on almost every aspect of human nature and the struggle against evil. *Wheel of Time* is far less cut-and-dried than the majority of fantasy, and by making the series so long, Jordan has given himself time to explore many avenues that would have been ignored in a more traditional novel or trilogy.

"He danced the forms in a darkness lit by the flame in his hands, shadows flying across faces above him, faces with wolves' muzzles and goats'..."

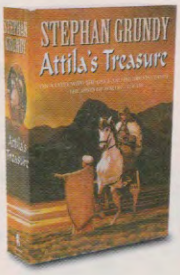
Unfortunately, it's this very scale that has begun to work against the last couple of books, including this one. The story has lost the sense of urgency and tension that made the first three so readable, and Jordan falls into the trap of spending too much time on unimportant details and minor side-plots. *A Crown of Swords* is still a cut above a lot of fantasy, but the pace needs to be picked up. It would probably help if Jordan set himself (and his readers) a goal by disclosing just how many books there will be in the series – at the moment you get the distinct impression that it could run forever, becoming more meandering and aimless as time goes by.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

Attila's Treasure

by Stephan Grundy Published by Michael Joseph
Paperback £10.99 Out now



An historical fantasy set in the court of the great warrior, *Attila's Treasure* often reads more like a history textbook than a novel and, to be honest, it takes some getting into. But the rewards of a few hours of heavy reading and the concomitant cross-referencing outweigh the level of effort required, and you may well eventually find yourself losing several days with your nose buried in this intriguing story.

That the author takes a serious academic interest in medieval history is quite apparent, and this shows

"Those Goths, Franks, Alamanns, Saxons, Burgundians and the rest who have not yet become Christians."

throughout an absorbing, if somewhat long-winded tale. Religion, Christian and Pagan, also features strongly, and spiritual journeying is tantamount in importance to more earthly adventure.

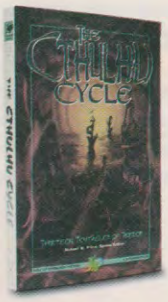
If you're running an *Ars Magica* campaign, or even *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, then you're probably into things such as 5th century Hunnish history, and

you would be well advised to read this book for its historical and geographical location, as much as for its twisting plot and heavy atmosphere. However, if you don't have such an interest, and you're just looking for an interesting read, you may well find *Attila's Treasure* a bit too much, especially at 500 pages.

Jonathan Palmer Score 6/10

Cthulhu Cycle: 13 Tentacles of Terror

Edited by Robert M Price Published by Chaosium
Paperback £10 Out now



One tentacle for every story in this Lovecraft-inspired compilation which Andy picked up at GenCon. Players of the game are sure to buy this whatever I say, and quite right too. But what about the rest of you? You've heard of *Cthulhu,* you'd like to start reading, but you don't know where to begin.

Well, here would be as good a place as any. Indeed, the master's seminal *Call of Cthulhu* features here – and that's where everybody else started, after all. Except for Lovecraft himself, who, it is suggested, began with Tennyson's *Kraken* and Dunsany. Indeed, Dunsany's *A Shop in Go-By Street* begins this collection.

"The dreams of man are older than brooding Egypt or the contemplative Sphinx or garden-girdled Babylon." (from *The Call of Cthulhu* by H P Lovecraft)

What impresses about Lovecraft is the way in which he seems to be trying to impart vital, or fatal, information. It is nonsense to say that Lovecraft believed what he wrote, but his writing gives that impression, and this makes reading him more engrossing. Not all of his literary descendants are so gifted, but Will Murray's *Black Fire* stands out, dealing as it does with Old Ones emerging from the Arctic wastes. And any Keeper interested in crop circles could have fun with C J Henderson's *Patiently Waiting.*

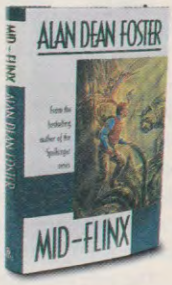
This is the eleventh Chaosium publication on the subject of old octopus-head, a series which includes *The Book of Iod* (reviewed in **arcane** 1). The editor's introduction is illuminating and each writer's story is prefaced with a short biographical paragraph to indicate their place in the Lovecraftian scheme of things. This is still some of the best fantasy horror you can get – a recommended read for all lovers of horror. It's all here; the various authors cross-reference each other well, and frankly, there's not a single weak link in it.

Jonathan Palmer

Score 9/10

Mid-Flinx

by Alan Dean Foster Published by Orbit
Hardback £16.99 Out now



It probably didn't matter in the States, but one of the characters in this book is called Enoch – I kept expecting him to shout. *Mid-Flinx* is classic *Traveller*-style science fiction starring Flinx, an unusual young man with empathic powers and a pet dragon from a distant star, who has a hugely sophisticated spaceship which he uses to jump between planets, and who's always getting into scrapes. This time he lands himself on a planet where the vegetation is running amok. 600 metre high trees cover the entire surface of the planet, above and among which all manner of weird and wonderful animals and plants survive.

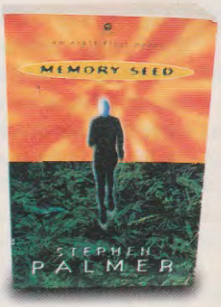
"'Look at that,' he murmured to Pip. 'Isn't adaptation wonderful?'"

Survival for the main human characters is a bit more difficult, because the flora and fauna of this inhospitable planet is very dangerous indeed. It's not a particularly novel idea (see Going Green below for a few more) and I was a little disappointed with this book. Foster keeps a tidy pace going, and the adventures and mis-adventures of the hero are all professionally related, but this story seems to lack some of the imagination and innovation so present in his *Spellsinger* series. I found the characters a little too thin to get involved with and the plot (including special surprise twist) just a little too predictable – it was not so much that I knew *what* was going to happen, just that I knew *when* it would happen. A pleasant book, but not a great one.

Steve Faragher Score 6/10

Going Green

One of the things that often gets overlooked in roleplaying is vegetation. If you want some good ideas about how to incorporate flora effectively, there are several books I can recommend.



First, is the now sadly out of print *Hothouse* by Brian Aldiss. The book is set on a planet much like the one described in *Mid-Flinx,* where the plants are huge and dangerous, and there is a different order in the world – humans are the prey of these immense vegetables. *Hothouse* is a classic.

If you want something more light-hearted but still jam-packed with good ideas you could try the *Deathworld* trilogy by Harry Harrison. This series describes the attempt to colonise a hostile planet, and is filled with a wonderful collection of specialised plants and animals that could easily be transported into your gameworld. For examples of bringing plants into modern-day campaigns, try *Pollen* by Jeff Noon or *Day of the Triffids* by John Wyndham. Whichever of these you can find, you'll certainly have your eyes opened to more possibilities.

GREAT LIBRARY GIVEAWAY

***The Knights of the Black Earth* could be yours.**

This month we have wheedled ten copies of parts 1 and 2 of *The Knights of the Black Earth* (see page 80). Part 2 was published by Victor Gollancz on the 22nd of August, the same day as its prequel reappeared in its paperback imprint *Vista.* To bag a brace, tell us the name of the best-selling fantasy series Margaret Weis has written with Tracy Hickman. Answers to '4,500,000', **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. First come first served.

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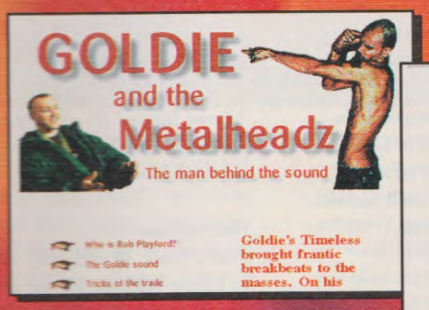

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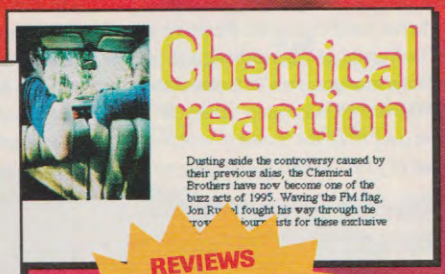
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arcane scribblings

The late summer's a hot time for the roleplaying industry – but have you been getting hot under the collar? Read on, dear readers, to find out...

Dear arcane,
My father teaches English literature at the University of Connecticut and he did a transfer program to teach at the City University in London for a year. I came over from the States to visit him for all of July. I'm into roleplaying so I

"There is no way I could pay £57 for 12 issues."

instantly went looking around for a roleplaying store, and quickly uncovered the Orc's Nest on Charing Cross Road where I saw **arcane**. I had an extra couple of pounds so I decided, 'what the hell, I might as well see what a British roleplaying magazine is like.' So I bought issue eight and loved it! I love all the reviews and articles on creating your own worlds and improving your characters. So I picked up issue two and issue nine and loved those too. I wish they sold **arcane** in America so that I could buy it every month. I see that you have overseas subscriptions and was hoping that I could get one. But no matter how much I love your magazine there is no way I could pay £57 (almost $100) for 12 issues. That's just too expensive!
Owen T Recchio, e-mail

The cost of postage means that yes, the price of an overseas subscription to **arcane** *is pretty high. However, you can buy* **arcane** *off the newsstand in America! If your local newsagent or games store doesn't stock it, give them the telephone numbers of our US distributors, which will then be able to supply copies of the mag (which retails for $5.95 over there). Those vital numbers are: Adventures Distributing 518 237 4870, or Chessex Mid West 219 482 5492. We're also in the process of trying to strike up a deal with Waldenbooks, so you should be seeing us in its stores as well before too long!*

Dear arcane,
Don't get rid of the book reviews! I'm sorry Ray Gillham (who wrote in **arcane** 10), but I simply can't agree with you. True, there is a lot of cash-in tat out there, but how do we know what the tat is unless someone reviews it and tells us what to avoid?
Andrew Cairns, Aberdeen

Good point – we're keeping a close eye on the **arcane** *reader survey returns we've been getting (I read every one – so your opinions are getting through to the right people), and feelings towards the book review pages are completely split – it looks like it's one of those sections in the mag that you either love or loath. However, enough of you certainly seem to love 'em, so the book reviews will be staying. It's official.*

Dear arcane,
In a recent letters page you were most unhelpful to a reader who inquired as to whether there was such a thing as a *Star Trek* RPG. Your suggestion that he search out copies of the game produced by FASA was fine, except that they are particularly difficult to get hold of, and they are extremely expensive as far as

"You were most unhelpful to a reader..."

second-hand books and modules go. Perhaps a game in print, such as Task Force Games' *Prime Detective*, or the excellent *GURPS Star Trek* adaptation available on the Internet, would have been far more useful as suggestions.
Matthew Pook, Milton Abbas

Yes, you're absolutely right, although the Star Trek *RPG by FASA was very good, and it's well worth the asking price if you can locate it.*

Dear arcane,
I would like to congratulate the Vampire Society at Bradford University for being singularly irresponsible. Allow me to quote from a recent article in the *Daily Mirror*: "Armed police besieged a house after prankster students dressed as vampires staged a mock kidnap in the street." Apparently, they then, "roared off in a van as part of a bizarre game."
Helen Gorman, Leek

It's not big and it's not clever. If you're going to be a vampire, just don't do it in public.

Dear arcane,
You're fools, all and one! Your reply to Martin Wildman's letter (**arcane** 9) which stated that Games Workshop doesn't do roleplaying games any more is wrong. I have acquired a GW game called *Space Marine: Epic Conflict in the 41st Millennium*, and it states quite clearly on the box that it is 3D roleplay.
Jarvis Pal, no address given

Er, yes, quite.

Dear arcane,
As a further point to the recent discussions in **arcane** about alignment, Palladium Games tried to put a new twist on the idea in its *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* system. Alignments were classified as basically good or evil, but there was also a selfish option. These were further broken down into classes such as 'principled,' 'scrupulous,' 'anarchist' and even 'diabolical'. Each alignment had a list of likely behaviours in a given situation, so a character like Dirty Harry might be principled, may work beyond the law to achieve a result, but only when the action conforms to his personal standard of morality (perhaps not quite such a high standard in Harry's case). This helped characters break away from the standard square-jawed superhero clichés and create something a bit more interesting.

communication

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No to all stats!

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

There's another good reason for not printing system-specific stats in your Encounters which no-one seems to have mentioned... Few referees have the luxury of being able to use stats unmodified anyway. Think about it. Most players will be reading **arcane** too, therefore, if you run an Encounter 'straight from the page' there won't be any surprises in store for the players. I always had this problem with the scenarios which used to appear in *White Dwarf* all those years back. In fact, I'd more often than not convert *D&D* scenarios for use with my *RuneQuest* group just to keep on top of my players. And what did I do? Yep, I had to make up the stats – indeed, the stats as printed were a waste of space because they were completely useless. So, as far as I'm concerned, **arcane** has got the balance just right.

Sarah Leusj, Camden Town, London

Hurrah, we finally seem to be getting through to people. I had to make up stats for White Dwarf *scenarios too, and I doubt there are many GMs who didn't.*

Thus, each alignment acted more as a template to encourage roleplaying, rather than the bland law/chaos straitjacket that people remember from *D&D*. Not bad for a roleplaying game in which players created characters based on giant mutant vigilante animals...

I've noticed that the more a player is involved with his or her character, the more he or she will roleplay. If a PC is a two-dimensional, faceless piece of cannon fodder he will be played that way, which is all very well for 'plunder' style gaming, but not for more involved roleplaying. Your article suggests that players should come up with a few personality traits, as opposed to a system such as *GURPS* (which I think was unfairly criticised), which encourages the use of Advantages/Disadvantages. This ad-hoc arrangement is all very well, but how do you encourage players to be true to their originally stated motives? By simplifying characters too much you make them boring, or that much harder for anyone to play effectively. Rules systems which give a solid framework for a complex character should, therefore, be encouraged rather than put down.

Paul Clammer, e-mail

Alignment has been one of those issues that has been discussed again and again throughout the roleplaying press, and all manner of arguments have been made to support and to denigrate the use of alignments in RPGs. As I've stated before, I think alignments are useful as a guide (I'm using them with the characters in the AD&D *campaign I'm running at the moment), but they should be used as no more. Maybe I'm wrong, what do you think about alignments? Should they be used or not?*

Dear arcane,

I have just read the latest copy of **arcane**, and despite it being up to the high standards I have come to expect from you, I can no longer tolerate the obnoxious and irritating views of Andrew Rilstone.

In issue five he condemned other gamers for getting annoyed at the moral majority by calling us, "narrow-minded bigots" and then, in the next issue, he wastes a page defending himself from the comments of someone who wrote a letter more than two months previously, and of which most of us couldn't give a damn.

Then, in the same issue that Mike Hodder gives an extremely valid

> "I can no longer tolerate the obnoxious views..."

argument about the lack of respect roleplayers receive in general, Mr Rilstone writes a humorous (oh yeah?) questionnaire which makes everyone reading the magazine and involved in the hobby look as if they're complete geeks. How are we supposed to be taken seriously by the general public if you publish this kind of drivel in the roleplaying magazine?

(And I know exactly what you're thinking, you think that I got some →

What the *hell* is this?

Is it...

A A personal night vision viewer with infra-red and UV transmitters?

B A mobile colour videophone with built-in mic and transceiver?

C A digital camera which stores pictures on disk?

T3: Tomorrow's Technology Today **– answering all your questions about the amazing world of high-tech hardware. Coming to a newsagent near you... *soon.***

A new magazine from the makers of arcane

T3

arcane shorts

We try to fit as many letters in as we can, but there's more chance to appear if you keep it short...

Regarding your feature about freeform gaming in issue 10... well, I can't see the difference between live action gaming and freeform. LARP possibly has more fighting, but it's still the same thing.

Mikko Sarri

I see your point, but you don't need to dress up silly for freeform games!

I really enjoyed the How to Ruin Your Game feature in **arcane** 10. And through your mag I've now started two play-by-mail games.

Arron Wilson

I'm glad to hear it.

Do you accept readers' scenarios, and if so, what format would you like them in? 3.5-inch disk, typed?

Timothy Dean

We welcome submissions of all sorts, though remember, scenarios should be like our Encounter section, and not system specific. And a digital copy on disk is always a bonus.

I have given up all hope of holding my breath long enough for *In Nomine* to appear. When will it ever arrive? I guess never. And how come my sneer on CCGs in **arcane** 7 didn't have my name attached, eh?

Colin Sinclair

We got a press release from Steve Jackson Games just yesterday, as it happens, and it states that In Nomine *will be with us for November. No, really, that's what it said. As for the name thing... I guess that's a "Whoops!"*

← ludicrously high score on his test, but I didn't – I only got 15 points, so suck on that Mr Rilstone!)

Christopher Manias, Wembley

One of the things that I attempt to do with **arcane** *is encourage some humour – far too many roleplayers take the hobby extremely seriously, and somehow manage to forget that they're supposed to be having fun. I think Andrew Rilstone helps to bring that humour into the mag, especially with columns like the questionnaire that you mention.*

As for his more serious columns, well, I think that without exception his comments are insightful and well worth reading – even if you don't agree with what's being said. So sorry, Andrew is here to stay.

Dear arcane,

I don't play collectable cards games, though I do accept the need for coverage of them in **arcane**. That said, you claim to ensure that your features are never system specific, and I don't believe that can be said of the Forging Alliances feature in **arcane** 9. The feature, which was a series of card combinations for *Magic: The Gathering*, was quite obviously system specific – it would have been of no use to anyone other than *Magic* players.

"You claim your features are never system specific."

Martin Lloyd, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Ahem. Yes, you're right, of course, though I think that we were justified in printing that feature. Magic *is by far and away the most popular CCG, and the* Alliances *release for it was a pretty hot thing at the time. It is, by the very nature of the things, pretty well impossible to do an 'advice' style feature on CCGs without it being system specific.* Magic, *in this case, was the obvious choice. And we shall do similar features in the future.*

Dear arcane,

In response to Paul Pettengale's review of the fantasy board game, *City of Chaos* in **arcane** 10, I felt I must write in to disagree with the review and the score given.

I am not a regular roleplayer, but I do enjoy fantasy board games and I had none of the problems that Paul experienced with the rules. I found the rules pretty straightforward and easy to follow, and I only had to make up about three house rules. Anyway, doesn't everyone make up their own rules when playing this type of game?

My friends and I found the game extremely enjoyable and fun to play, and I was thus very surprised to read Paul's comments – I think they were unfair and unjustified.

Jacqueline Spicer, Leeds

The review of City of Chaos *in* **arcane** *10 was based upon many, many hours of playtesting, and I stand by my comments. I too thought the game was fun. It had a fresh approach, it was involving when your character was the focus of attention, and it was most certainly entertaining. However, the rules were a problem – we spend a lot of time reading rulebooks, and the one that explains how* City of Chaos *works simply misses out rules for a number of situations that cropped up in the game. And that is simply not good enough. Sure, gamers often make up new rules, but the point is, they shouldn't HAVE to in order to play the game straight out of the box. And remember, we hardly gave* City of Chaos *a panning – it got 6/10 which means it's above average, but not without problems.*

Dear arcane,

I have just started reading **arcane** 9. I enjoy the content of the magazine but I do wish you would make it easier to read. I could complain about the very tiny lilac on mauve used on the Conventions column on page 12, or the as-tiny white on black in the Card of the Month box on the same page. But what has pushed me to write again on this topic is on page 25. Several column inches of a good article are lost by printing in black ink over an almost-black background picture. How can anyone be expected to read this? Please show more respect for the eyes of your subscribers and the writing of your contributors by making the magazine a pleasure to read, not a struggle.

Sheila Thomas, e-mail

Our layout artists make every effort to ensure that **arcane** *is easy to read, and that was certainly the case with issue 9. Unfortunately, that issue suffered from 'over-inking' at the printing stage, which means too much of all the colours ended up on the page, making the issue look much darker than it should (despite press-printing checks at our end to try to prevent this). We have 'had words' with our printers, and we are attempting to ensure that this doesn't happen again.*

Dear arcane,

I've been intending to set up a roleplaying club here in Brighton, but I don't really know how to go about it. There's a suitable pub that has an upstairs which they let out for club meetings, so I guess I could use that, but what about advertising the club, organising the finances and all of that sort of business? I would appreciate some help in those areas.

"I don't know how to set up a roleplaying club."

David Twyne, Brighton

Setting up a roleplaying or gaming club is pretty easy really. The most difficult bit – finding a venue – has already been sorted in your instance. Other than that, why not use the free reader ads in **arcane** *to advertise your club's existence, and back that up with notices in your local games stores (most of them have notice boards for gamers to advertise their availability for gaming sessions). In terms of finances – don't worry about this, just charge everyone who comes enough to cover the hire of the room each week, that's if the pub actually charges.*

arcane On-Line

Read the electronic version of arcane every minute of the dat at http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html *for debate, contacts, reviews and fun.*

At first, it seemed like a poison chalice. Edit the **arcane** Web pages, they said, and do it well. An Olympian task, and I had as much chance of a medal as the English basketball squad. However, I was soon proven wrong. As part of FutureNet, Europe's biggest commercial Web site, **arcane** On-Line is a diverse and dedicated resource reflecting the best of the gaming world. It offers hints and tips, news, reviews and features, and is permanently accessible to a global audience.

The forums give you a chance to talk with like-minded souls on games-related topics, and you'd be surprised at the subjects covered. Contributors may even run their own groups, which can be publicised in our new Club Crawl – see below. And if you've visited us and found little of interest, we want to know why. Comments and criticism to klevell@, whoops, to me at the e-mail address below. Becoming part of **arcane** On-Line could not be simpler, so connect now, and let the fun begin.

Peter Hill, On-line Editor phill@futurenet.co.uk

Web site of the month

Where is it?

http://cordelia.fnal.gov/~jhkim/rpg/freerpgs.html

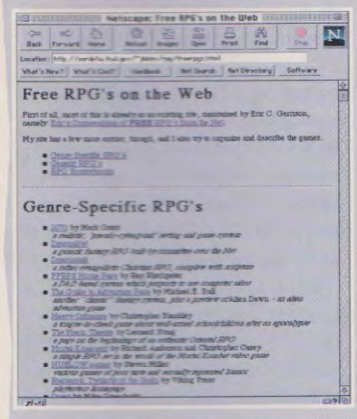
What is it?

A goldmine of gratis games.

What's it like?

It's an exhaustive list of free RPGs, categorised and given lengthy reviews. It's creator, John N Kim, certainly hasn't gone overboard in the style department, but what his pages lack in flair they gain in easy access and navigation. Regularly updated, it may benefit from looking further afield for source material, but overall this site is a definite winner and is worthy of a visit.

There are many roleplaying games which have been written by enthusiasts and then saved out as 'shareware' or 'lite' versions, which are available electronically for you to print out at home. If you like the game in question, the author asks you to send some money, and in return you frequently receive additional rules and scenarios.



The ABC of free RPGs. Get loads of shareware and 'lite' versions of games from this exhaustive web site. Go on, give it a go.

Welcome to the **arcane** forum – here's a taster of what you can find there...

The arcane forum has glowed a mild shade of red in recent weeks. The subject in question was intolerant attitudes towards roleplayers. There has been some heated debate – these edited snippets tell the tale:

Why do all homosexual characters have to be raging queens, and all lesbians butch? I have homosexual friends, and most of them couldn't be picked out of a crowd of heterosexuals. By the way, on the subject of homosexuality, the attitude of many LARPers has really pissed me off recently. THESE PEOPLE CAN ROLEPLAY WITH THE BEST OF THEM, and stop flattering yourselves that they'll fancy you anyway, and what business of yours is it who they spend the night with?

It may well be time to take a good long look at this industry and where it's headed. If we want to keep going we'll have to change some of these things or drive out the very people we should be attracting in order to expand further.

Rhona,
rhona@patrol.i-way.co.uk

Why would you expect gamers to be any more or less tolerant than anyone else? Okay, so we put up with 'satanist slurs', but aren't we just a slice of the population at large? I've certainly met more than one ignorant and bigoted dice roller!

A. Neill,
A.Neill@qub.ac.uk

Gaming in general need not concern itself with race, sexuality or physical appearance. I think that these matters are irrelevant to our hobby, and if we choose to ignore them in our games, so much the better.

MARAUDER,
RobDeville@MSN.COM

Dice rolling need not concern itself with race, sexuality or gender I agree, but roleplay often does, if you wish to get into any sort of character!

No offence intended, I really like games that involve no roleplaying as well, hmm, actually maybe I bring a roleplaying element to *Risk*... You Prussian Swine! How dare you ignore our treaty over the Baltic Sea, etc... ho ho ho.

Matt Prowse,
Maximus@hotmail.com

The concept of roleplaying is fairly neutral and, while it is sadly true that a lot of the RPG sub-culture is less than a model of enlightenment, it undoubtedly has the potential to do good things. I don't know how many of my roleplaying group have ever met skinny black kids, and I wouldn't be surprised if they have a few prejudices among them. However, once they have met Pascal LeFevre (my new character) they might just find a few of those barriers beginning, bit by bit, to be pulled down... Prejudice is created by the illusions of our minds, but understanding thrives on reality (as he might well tell his friends).

Wulf,
w.forrester-barker@cogs.ac.uk

Why not have your say?

Club crawl

Do you run a roleplaying club? Or a league for card players? Are you looking for new members? Well, **arcane** on-line can help. Simply send us the details of your club on the form below and we'll enter them into our forthcoming Club Directory. Please complete using block capitals.

Club name .....

Where do you meet? .....

When do you meet? .....

Which games do you play? .....

Are there any restrictions (students only, meeting fees, etc)? .....

Contact name .....

Contact telephone number .....

Contact e-mail address .....

Contact Web site .....

Send to: Peter Hill, arcane on-line, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW. Or you can e-mail the details to phill@futurenet.co.uk.

free reader ads

A veritable cornucopia, as they say, of treasures, trinkets and gossip...

games for sale

● *AD&D* sets, supplements, books and Dragon magazines for sale. Stuart Lyscombe, 14 Western Rd, Havant, Hants PO9 1NJ

● Unpainted Citadel orcs, undead, fantasy chaos. Half list price. Send a ssae to Dave, 1 Laleham Walk, Margate, Kent

● *Azhanti High Lightning* – rare *Traveller* boardgame. Highest serious offer secures. Jon 01536 517909

cards for sale

● *Jyhad, Star Trek* and *INWO*. Patrick Boughton, 5 Albert Rd, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5RF

● *Illuminati* – send sae for price list to *INWO*, 4 Baines House, Abbey Barn Rd, High Wycombe, Bucks HP11 1RJ

● 1,600 unlimited *ME:TW* including 78 rares and 376 dragons. £110 ono. David 01952 414026

● Extremely rare misprinted black *M:TG* card. Has been valued at £110. Stuart Lyscombe, 14 Western Rd, Havant, Hants PO9 1NJ

What is it then, eh? Go on then, what is it? Gissit, then. Go 'ead.

● *M:TG* cards for sale – 2,500+ approx £300 ono (includes rare *Alliances* cards) – evenings only, Adrian 0181 241 5859

● Type 1 and Type 2 *Magic* cards for sale or trade. Includes lots of OOP. Graham 01703 443060

wanted

● *Dragonlord* die for *Dragon Dice* game. Lee 0113 271 3532 after 5pm. Good price paid

● *Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* chromium subset widescreen cards. Contact Lee 0113 271 3532

● Early *White Dwarf* issues 1-15. Reasonable price paid for decent condition. Mervyn 0116 271 7793 after 6pm

● *Green and Pleasant Land – CoC* supplement by Games Workshop. Mark 0161 620 2282

● *RuneQuest 1st ed.* Also *Army of Darkness* game. Will pay good prices. Call James after 7pm on 01232 661835

● *White Dwarf* – issue 35 onwards. You know, back when it was good. 0114 288 2696

● Anything to do with *Megatraveller, AD&D (2nd ed), Dr Who* and *Star Trek* RPGs – scenarios, supplements etc. Dave 01654 781272

● Collectable art trading cards – Vallejo, Elvgren, Varga, Olivia, Frazetta Brom Achilleos. Mike, 71 Mill Lane, Doncaster DN6 8PE

● Desperately need *Spacemaster* stuff by Iron Crown. Anything in serviceable condition. Contact Nick on 0161 432 6549, evenings please. Good prices

● GMT *Korea 1995*, Golan 90 (Victory?), SPI *Next War*, Mayfair *Ultimatum*. Reasonable condition Good prices. Krys 0117 907 1301

● *Kult/Vampire: TES* cards. Will buy, sell or trade. Contacts wanted also. Write to 54 Bolingbroke St, Heaton, Newcastle NE6 5PH

● *Magic* and other CCGs – buy collections and singles – pay reasonable prices – e-mail arcodb@fatima.dds.nl

● *Twilight: 2000* modules *Going Home* and *Red Star Lone Star*. Stephen 01463 241933

There was a Swede looking for the Star Trek *RPG a few issues back. Stephen Ennis of Bishop Auckland says you can have his for nothing. What a nice man. Get in touch through* **arcane**, *clearly marking your envelope 'tack för spelen'.*

clubs

● Inverness roleplaying/wargaming association meets Cameron Youth Club, Planefield Rd, Tues, 6-10pm. First two nights are free

● Albion Guard Games Club, Mon/Tues eves, The Plough, Dogs Head St, Ipswich. RPGs/CCGs, wargames and boardgames. Keith 01473 289560

They get up to all sorts of things.

● Motherwell wargames club meets Tuesdays 6.30pm at Newarthill Community Centre. Play *AD&D, Johnny Reb*. Neil 01698 267253

● North Herts wargamers meet Sundays in Old Hale Way, Hitchin. Peter 01462 625054

● Richmond, N Yorks FWG. Mostly GW but expanding. Fridays, 5.30pm, YMCA. Kev 01748 825622, eves

● Bromley Games Club. Every Sunday, Star & Garter, 12-6pm. Chris 0181 7770054

● Gloucester: Innsworth Wargaming and Roleplaying (WARP). We play *WFRP, AD&D, MSPE* and wargames. Mel Tudno-Jones 01452 854257

● Goblin Horde are recruiting sci-fi and fantasy roleplayers, Wednesday nights, Stockport. Rachel 0161 4561444. James 0973 256276

● Finchley Games Club. Every Thursday, 6.30-10.30pm. Old Finchleians Sports Club, Woodside Park. Seren 0181 202 3856

● Barnsley trading card club meets Tuesdays, 6pm, Pitt St Methodist Church, Barnsley. New players always welcome 01226 785024

● Black Country RPS. Thursdays 7.30pm. Waterfall Inn, Waterfall Lane, Blackheath, West Midlands. All ages and games. Only 70p a night. Steve Turner 01384 235244

● Guild of Melee and Magic – London's biggest club – 1st visit free, annual membership £5
Central – Jason 0181 7158675
South – Jon 0181 6999654
West – Gerald 0181 9911297
East – Douglas 0181 5535332

● Manticore Games Club! Cards, Boardgames, RPGs! We play anything! Thurs, 7.30pm. Old Bell, Hemel Hempstead . 01442 216777

contacts

Neil Reading of Taunton writes to tell us that his postman won't deliver responses to his ad in **arcane**, *because they're so numerous, so would we please take it out. Well, we would have done so anyway, mate. There's no room for repeat ads any more. If you want your ad to appear again, phone or drop us a line.*

● Nottingham – Players wanted by referee for middle-eastern Fantasy RPG. Heavy on atmosphere. Paul 0115 985 6764

● 14 year-old *Rage* player seeks others in Bristol. Contact Justin on 0117 969 1017

● 17 year-old gamer seeks RPGers in Anglesey. Will play anything. Hywel 01407 740809

● 4 seek more! (16+) Any RPG system considered. Worcester area. Call Monty 01386 860404 (evenings only)

● Anyone in Cambridge area play *Warhammer Battle* or roleplaying games? Doog 01223 420968

We can think of a few.

● 24 year-old ref/player seeks others (18+) in Coventry/ Warwickshire area. Open to any systems. Call Lee 01426 857072, after 6pm

● Complete novice (19) seeks roleplayers and wargamers. Play most games. Simon 01773 822134

● Hi! I am new to the roleplaying front. Can someone explain *AD&D?* I am only 11. Please help!

Er, okay, Michael – read **arcane**, *and speak to a well-established, trustworthy club near you in London, such as The Guild of Melee and Magic, for example.*

● *M:TG* and *WFRP/CoC* gamers from the Fareham area wanted (16+) – Wayne 01329 280367 or write to 14 Margarita Rd, Fareham, Hants PO15 5HG

● *Netrunner/Cyberpunk* sci-fi player seeks gamers in Watford. Experienced in most systems. Write to Ragnar, 34-B Wiggenhall Rd, Watford WD1 8AL

● Novice gamers required to play anything – adults only – no egomaniacs please! Bradford area. Wayne 01274 735982

● Novice *M:TG* player wants opponents and RPG club. 12+. Crediton area. Tim 01363 774667

● Old timer (30) seeks help to escape from Limbo – Swindon area. Will try anything! Call Brian on 01793 723020

Have you tried the M4?

● Player seeks mature RPG group into Glorantha/Tekumel in

reader ads

Northumberland/North Tyneside area. Stephen 01670 355258

● Players/DMs wanted – any system. Tunbridge Wells/East Grinstead. Will travel. Call Douglas 01732 864346

● Wanted: experienced *Magic* players in Southampton area to test decks for Type 2 tournaments. Also anyone interested in forming a club. Graham 01703 443060

contacts (Canada)

● Players and GM needed in Toronto area. Any age (I'm 12). Any RPG. Call 416 653 2519. Ask for Adrian B

pagan females/trees

● Hi Pagan Female! I'm fond of trees, too. Write soon: Michael Fitzpatrick, Sheegora, Boyle, Co Roscommon, éire

Hurray for the trees!

live action

● London *Masquerade Vampire* LARP meetings every month. New blood required. Contact Cole on 0181 958 1604

● Free webspace for UK LRP clubs. Suppliers/site owners also considered. Contact Anna, e-mail anna@abraxax.sonnet.co.uk 0181 3183375

We've given Anna's correct e-mail address this time, but if you call let the phone ring a fair while because it's down the other end of the house.

● Fomoria LRP, adventure in deepest, darkest Dorset. A Tolkeinesque gameworld – beginners are welcome – quests commissioned. Contact Darren 01725 517322

In which, Beefy the Ogre might challenge you to a drinking competition, apparently. Can you empty the eternal tankard?

● Midgard LRP in Bishops Stortford area meets Sundays. Call Jason 01279 659127

● Free A3 PBM news-sheet (1st issue September). PBM players please contact 01703 696138 with your thoughts on the game

● Self-igniting church candle £6, gushing smoke pods red/white £5 (can be set off with 9v battery) large magic user's walking cane and latex weapon, brand new £30 – Call on 0151 3439363

● Cricket PBM. Profits to charity. Graham, eves, 0115 9283114

fanzines and PBM

● New penpal mag needs new members and ads. Details from Gael Bladen-Hovel, 13 Hillside Ave, Silverstone, Northants NN12 8UR

● *Tomb* issue 2 – the vampire quarterly. £2.50 inc p&p. Fiction, news, *Masquerade, Eternal Struggle* CCG, short story, interactive game, colour cover! M W Jones, 40 Hawk Close, Abbeydale, Glos. GL4 4WE

● *Enigma* – new fanzine. Writers and artists needed. Send ssae to Thomas, 19 Southfield Road, Tunbridge Wells TN4 9UH

● *Reunion.* Tolkein freaks only. New *Middle-earth* calenders, weird ideas £1. Martin Baker, 37 Marlborough Court, Newcastle/Tyne NE3 2YY

● *Visions* – fantasy/sci-fi fanzine. It's good. Ssae + £1 for issue 1. David House, 8 Eythrope Rd, Stone, Bucks HP17 8PG

● Writers and artists wanted for new sf/fantasy magazine. Sae to 39 Stoneyfield Road, Old Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 2HP, UK

● Would like to join adult PBM game. Contact me soon. John Wall, 2 Springfield Close, Westham, Pevensey, East Sussex BN24 5JE

● Playtesters needed for sci/fantasy PBM. Special rates for PC owners. Chris 0181 850 9099, evenings

messages

● Rob Barrett please get in touch with your old mate. Neil, 53 St Clements Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth BH1 4DX

● Caitiff vampire seeks covert work from Princes of England. Very reasonable rates

● *The Lost Chapters* seek Grant Ashwood, Mike Armstrong and Moonstone for revenge purposes. Love Timothy and Panda

● Denizens of Hollow beware! The end of the hive is nigh!! Redeem yourself!!! Purge with the flame!!!!

● Grunnson's marauders will free Allen the Snotling. Leave £500 worth faery mead in katsurai

● Jason Belam: contact Mr Gray at Two The Green, Wardy Hill, Ely, Cambs CB6 2DE. The contract is up

● To USS Bozeman – signal received. USS Hero complex en route to deal with pirates. Hold tight. Captain N C O'Conner

● USS Bozeman – IKC Qu'jagh stands ready to assist. Space Pirates beware – we will brook no interference – Captain K'vor.

Help is at hand for the shipwrecked crew of the USS Bozeman.

other stuff

● For sale – CD32 with 13 games. Huge selection of Amiga A500, A600, A1200 games. Call Lee on 0113 271 3532

● *Campaign Cartographer* by ProFantasy Software, double present. Unopened. Cost £49.95 + £5 p+p. Accept £35 inc p+p. Donald 0131 667 9187

● Creative mind required to help design and develop game concepts. Stephen, 30 Devonshire Road, Burnham/Crouch, Essex CM0 8DR

● Figure painting by ex-'Eavy Metal painter. Also illustrations of RPG characters. Stuart Thomas, 272 Alfreton Rd, Nottingham NG7 5LS – 0115 978 4478

● Found 2 Terry Pratchett books on the Liverpool/Chester train in July. Alex 0151 343 9363

● Free science fiction and fantasy? Where else but: http://www.sf-fantasy.com. Includes fiction, reviews and art gallery!

● Wanted: ideas for FRPG/SFRPG. More info – Martin Crowther, 14 Fairhope Ave, Salford M6 8AH (sae where possible)

Please place my free ad under the following heading

- ☐ Games for sale
- ☐ Cards for sale
- ☐ Wanted
- ☐ Clubs
- ☐ Contacts
- ☐ Live action
- ☐ Fanzines and PBM
- ☐ Messages
- ☐ Other stuff

arcane reader ads are open to individuals and non-profit making organisations only.

Terms and conditions

- All ads are accepted in good faith
- **arcane** reserves the right to refuse or amend ads at our discretion
- We cannot vouch for the quality of goods and services offered in this section
- Under 18s must have the permission of a parent or guardian before placing a reader ad in **arcane**

October 1996

WRITE YOUR FREE AD HERE IN BLOCK CAPITALS, USING ONE BOX PER WORD

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ **Postcode** _____

SEND TO: arcane READER ADS, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BEAUFORD COURT, BATH BA1 2BW

Gnome World PART 4
WRITERS: DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING
ARTIST: ANDREW CURRIE
ABOARD THE DWARF MINING SHIP NOSRILHOLE, SURVIVING CREWMEMBERS DOC, BURLY, SPUNKY AND GRIZZLER MAKE A NASTY DISCOVERY . . .
HE'S DEAD! THE CAPTAIN'S DEAD! WE'RE ALL STUFFED!
ZAT MEANS YOU ARE NOW IN CHARGE, BO'SUN SPUNKY.
I SAY WE OVERLOAD THE STEAM TURBINE AND TAKE TO THE SKIFF. THE BEASTIE CAN FEND FOR ITSELF WHEN THE BLEEDIN' SHIP GOES DOWN!
RIGHT. THANKS DOC.
SO NOTED, BURLY.
I'LL MAKE THAT DECISION . . . AND I'VE SOME THINGS TO CHECK OUT BEFORE I DO.
JUST 'URRY UP, THEN!
SPUNKY CONSULTS THE SHIP'S SCRYING BALL IN THE CABIN . . .
OH, YE FIRE-SPRITES OF THE GREAT SMITHY, TELL ME WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST!
AN OTHERWORLDLY BEAST, ALIEN TO THE GNOMIC WORLD, A BEAST FROM ANOTHER GENRE KNOWN AS A JABBERW-
AAAAHHG!
F-KRSSHH!
YOU HAVE HEARD ENOUGH, LITTLE VUN!
DOC! WHAT IN BALIN'S BIG PANTS ARE YOU DOING?
HAVE YOU GONE M- OH MY GODS! YOU'RE AN ORC!
ZAT'S RIGHT, DWARFY!
AND ZAT MAKES YOU ORC-BAIT!
SHWOOKK!
I BLOODY 'ATE ORCS. ME!
TO BE CONTINUED . . .

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DICEMASTER

SILENT DEATH™

Have you played this award-winning CCG yet? Want to learn? Be sure to check out on-going teaching demos of the *Middle-earth Collectible Card Game*™ presented by ICE Inc., Hobbygames Ltd., and the Storm Traders crew! Free promotional cards will also be available for fans to pick up.

The first UK national event for *MECCG*™ will be held on the Saturday of the European GEN CON Game Fair. Storm Traders will run a 64-player open field to determine the 1996 UK champion. Contact the promotions department at Hobbygames Ltd. for pre-registration information, or sign-up on arrival at the con.

European GEN CON attendees will have the opportunity to get a sneak preview of the *Dicemaster*™ customizable dice game from Hobbgygames Ltd. and Iron Crown Enterprises. The designers will be among those available for teaching demos—and of course we'll have free promo dice while they last!

ICE's fast paced starship combat game is a top draw event at U.S. GEN CON—here's your chance to see what all the excitement is about. ICE staff will be on hand to teach the game, and before you know it, you'll be challenging other players to battle it out! We'll have some cool promo items to hand out as well.

Our team will also be previewing *Arena of Steel*™. This *Combat Express*™ game features rules to use with the *Steel Warriors*™ plastic miniatures already available from Hobbygames Ltd. and ICE Inc. All *Combat Express* games will use the popular combat system from *Silent Death* in some new type of setting. *Arena of Steel* is a game of gladitorial sci-fi combat.

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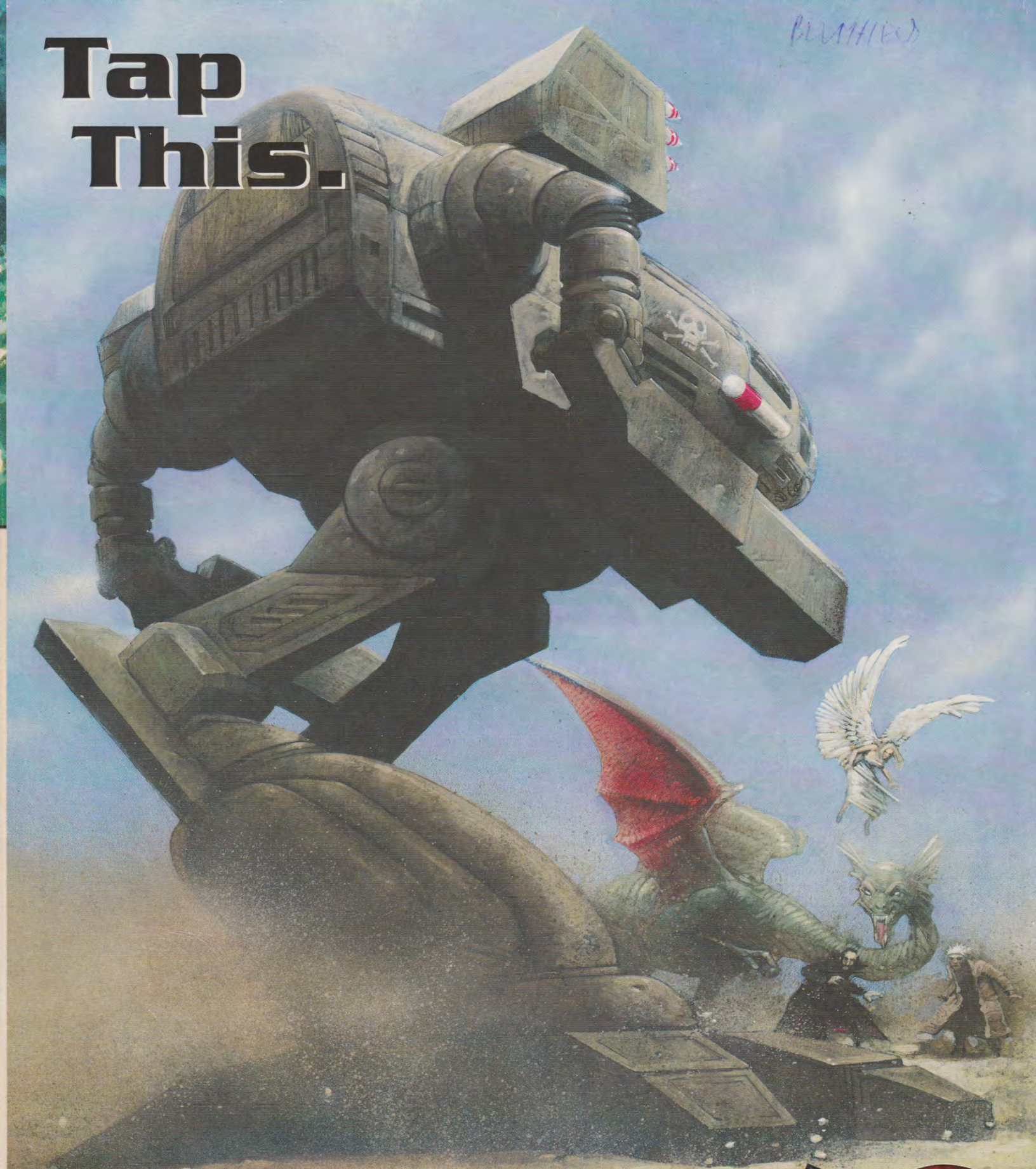

This fall, the field belongs to the BATTLETECH® trading card game.
Overwhelming firepower. Superior combat tactics.
All TCGs answer to the 'Mech this November.

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